MARÍA IZQUIERDO: RELIGION, GENDER, *MEXICANIDAD,* AND MODERN ART, 1940-1948

by

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ABSTRACT

MARÍA IZQUIERDO: RELIGION, GENDER, *MEXICANIDAD,* AND MODERN ART, 1940-1948

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This dissertation examines the religious imagery in the art of the Mexican painter María Izquierdo (1902-1955). Among the first women in Mexico to earn her living as a professional painter, Izquierdo was an internationally renowned artist in her lifetime and remains one of the most notable artists in twentieth-century Mexican art history. Hers is a legacy that was not easily attained; working within a profession and nationalist discourse that was intensely masculine, she was persistent in her efforts to carve out a legitimate and respected space for women and for herself. Between 1940 and 1948 Izquierdo produced many paintings that incorporated popular and traditional Catholic artifacts and iconography that likewise touched upon feminine cultural experience, such as still-lifes of domestic shrines to the Virgin Mary and portraiture that evoked Madonna and Child motherhood imagery.

My study revises the critical commonplace that Izquierdo's religious imagery reflects one facet of a collective Mexican cultural identity. Rather, I argue that these paintings expose an intricate web of social constructions involving ethnicity, gender, nationalism, and modernity. Examining public statements by the artist and the unique historical, economic, and sociocultural context of the decade of the 1940s, Izquierdo's domestic altars, Madonna imagery, self-portraiture, and related paintings constitute a strategic response to women's issues, the Catholic experience, the particular rhetoric of *mexicanidad* of that decade, and her concerted efforts to advance her professional career and notoriety. By joining her carefully crafted public persona to a strategic use of religious iconography that tapped into values intimately connected to a wide audience, Izquierdo accomplished what no woman before her had done. She reframed the role of women in the cultural narrative of the nation and successfully positioned herself as a great artist synonymous with Mexican culture itself.

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INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the religious imagery in the art of the 1940s of the Mexican painter María Izquierdo (1902-1955). Among the first women in Mexico to earn her living as a professional painter, Izquierdo was an internationally renowned artist in her lifetime – a more famous artist than Frida Kahlo – and remains one of the most notable figures in twentieth-century Mexican art history. Hers is a legacy that was not easily attained; working within a profession and nationalist discourse that was intensely masculine, Izquierdo was persistent in her efforts to carve out a legitimate and respected space for women and for herself. Combining the forces of Izquierdo's ambition, public persona, and use of religious iconography that tapped into values intimately connected to a broad audience, she endeavored to accomplish what no woman before her had done: to write women into the cultural narrative of the nation and to firmly establish her own high position in the arts.

Since the 1930s, critics have celebrated María Izquierdo's art as quintessentially Mexican. Drawing from both European and local avant-garde sources, Izquierdo developed a unique visual language and style. Expressed through an earthy palette, Izquierdo's work of the 1930s shared the coarse strokes of the modern "primitivism" of the painter Rufino Tamayo in unusual juxtapositions of ordinary objects.[1] Izquierdo is perhaps best known today for her watercolors of circus scenes, a series developed in the 1930s, infused with a modernist, metaphysical sensibility and that also hark back to memories of her youth in rural Mexico. Her work through the 1930s bears evidence of her involvement with Los Contemporáneos, an avant-garde group of writers and painters who aimed to capture an essence of both the Mexican and "the universal" in their work. Her web of influence extended beyond the borders of Mexico, and her treatment of the Mexican landscape was tinged with the stark eeriness of Giorgio de Chirico's scenes of urban ruin.

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[1] Izquierdo and Tamayo were involved in a relationship from 1929 to 1933; a thorough analysis of their relationship is offered by Olivier Debroise in "The Shared Studio: María

Notably, Izquierdo's style and subject matter changed around 1940.[2] Her painting shifted to a brighter palette and increasingly focused on things Mexican. It was also at this time that popular and traditional Catholic artifacts and iconography became a prominent feature in her artwork. Between 1940 and 1948 Izquierdo produced a broad body of work including, among other things, still-lifes of popular Day of the Dead artifacts, domestic shrines to the Virgin Mary, and representations of Adam and Eve and the Madonna and Child.[3]

Scholars consistently acknowledge Izquierdo's employment of religious iconography. However, the meanings, cultural implications, and strategies behind the use

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Izquierdo and Rufino Tamayo," in *The True Poetry: The Art of María Izquierdo* (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1997), 49-63.

[2] Elizabeth Ferrer identifies this shift in her essay, "A Singular Path: The Artistic Development of María Izquierdo," in *The True Poetry: The Art of María Izquierdo*, 18.

[3] Izquierdo suffered a stroke in 1948, which greatly compromised her use of her right hand, and another in 1950; her productivity tapered but, remarkably, did not cease. Her late paintings, until her death in 1955, exhibit a rougher texture and stroke, and draw from an array of themes she employed at various stages of her career.

of this iconography have yet to be analyzed adequately. Most scholarship to date fails to move beyond an interpretation of her religious imagery as nostalgic mementos of her strict Catholic upbringing and as customary manifestations of post-Revolutionary *mexicanidad*. While these interpretations are sound, they form only part of a bigger picture. Examining public statements by the artist and the unique historical, economic, and sociocultural context of the decade of the 1940s, Izquierdo's domestic altars, Madonna imagery, self-portraiture, and related paintings constitute a strategic response to women's issues, the Catholic experience, the particular rhetoric of *mexicanidad* of that decade, and her concerted efforts to advance her professional career and notoriety.

LITERATURE REVIEW

María Izquierdo was a prolific painter, consistently active from the late 1920s until her death in 1955. Since the 1929 student show that garnered the attention of her then-teacher Diego Rivera,[4] Izquierdo enjoyed her fair share of critical attention. Through regular exhibitions of her work and positive reviews in the avant-garde and mainstream presses, the artist made a solid name for herself. Her work was admired by Los Contemporáneos, a progressive and loosely banded group of artists, poets and writers;

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[4] In 1929, Rivera was the director of the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, where Izquierdo studied painting. He heartily praised Izquierdo and her work as, among other things, "classically Mexican." Diego Rivera, "María Izquierdo," exhibition catalog, Galería de Arte Moderno, at the Teatro Nacional, Mexico City (1929). Quoted in *María Izquierdo* (Mexico: Casa de Bolsa CREMI, 1986), 51-52.

four of her paintings were reproduced in the journal *Contemporáneos* in 1929.[5] Not only was Izquierdo among the twenty-five artists featured in Carlos Mérida's 1937 book *Modern Mexican Artists: Critical Notes*, she was the only woman among them.[6] By the time that she appeared in MacKinley Helm's survey of modern Mexican painters – alongside her partner, the Chilean painter Raúl Uribe – in 1941, Izquierdo was on her way to national and international acclaim.[7] In the 1940s, as this dissertation will go on to elaborate, Izquierdo enjoyed a successful career on a mainstream professional track: she, among other accolades, exhibited her paintings locally and abroad; traveled though South America as a cultural ambassador; published art criticism; and prospered financially with the sale of her paintings, particularly in the U.S. market.

As scholarship in Mexican art history expanded in the 1980s, renewed critical attention was cast on María Izquierdo. A section of Olivier Debroise's landmark study *Figuras en el Trópico, Plástica Mexicana 1920-1940* is devoted to the artist.[8] The decade witnessed a series of major Izquierdo retrospectives in Mexico, culminating in an extensive survey of her work in 1988; the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition, *María Izquierdo*, contains the most broad and inclusive *catalogue raisonné* of the artist's work published to date.[9] In the 1990s, two solo Izquierdo exhibitions finally reached the United States, providing U.S. audiences with their first comprehensive exposure to the artist and to scholarly catalogues with both English and Spanish translations. Teresa del Conde and Luis-Martín Lozano wrote the texts for the exhibition catalogue for the show at the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum in Chicago in 1996, and Elizabeth Ferrer, Olivier Debroise, and Elena Poniatowska provided the essays for *The True Poetry: The Art of María Izquierdo*, the 1997 exhibition at the Americas Society Art Gallery in New York City.[10] Most recently, the catalogue *Un Arte Nuevo: El Aporte de María Izquierdo/A New Art: The Contribution of María Izquierdo*, with texts by Adriana Zavala, was published in 2008 in conjunction with the exhibition of works from the Andrés Blaisten collection in Mexico City.[11]

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[5] Izquierdo's work appeared in *Contemporáneos*, no. 16 (September 1929). Cited in Adriana Zavala, "María Izquierdo," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, eds. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham, Duke University Press, 2006), 71.

[6] Carlos Mérida, *Modern Mexican Artists: Critical Notes* (Mexico: Frances Toor Studios, 1937), 83-84. The novelty was not lost on Mérida, who opened his passage with the note, "It is not very frequent that one finds a Mexican woman, making a profession of painting and above all successfully." Mérida's surprise, too, makes evident the state of relative impenetrability of a woman into a man's profession, as well as Izquierdo's power to overcome it.

[7] MacKinley Helm, *Modern Mexican Painters: Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros and other artists of the Social Realist School* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941; reprint, New York: Dover, 1989).

[8] Olivier Debroise, "El espíritu rojo no ha muerto (María Izquierdo)," in *Figuras en el Trópico, Plástica Mexicana 1920-1940* (Barcelona: Ediciones Océano, 1984), 153-166.

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[9] The exhibition catalogues of the 1980s retrospectives provide exceptional primary source compendia. *María Izquierdo - Monografía* (Mexico: Departmento de Bellas Artes, Gobierno de Jalisco, 1985); *María Izquierdo* (México: Casa de Bolsa CREMI, 1986); and *María Izquierdo: nacionalismo cultural* (México: Partido Revolucionario Institucional, 1988). Deeper critical investigations blossom in *María Izquierdo* (México, D.F.: Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, A.C., 1988).

[10] Two major exhibitions dedicated to Izquierdo's work have been mounted in the United States. See: *María Izquierdo, 1902-1955* (Chicago: Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, 1996); and *The True Poetry: The Art of María Izquierdo* (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1997). Luis-Martín Lozano's essay contribution in the 1996 catalogue was further expanded into a richly illustrated book: Luis-Martin Lozano, *María Izquierdo: una verdadera pasión por el color* (México, D.F.: Americo Arte Editores: Landucci Editores: CONACULTA, 2002).

[11] *Un Arte Nuevo: El Aporte de María Izquierdo/A New Art: The Contribution of María Izquierdo* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2008). Zavala

A warm, well-liked woman with a colorful personality, María Izquierdo left a lasting impression on those who knew her. Octavio Paz shared his personal encounters with Izquierdo in the late 1930s in his *Essays on Mexican Art*.[12] Inés Amor, director of the Galería de Arte Mexicano, recounts her dealings with numerous Mexican modern artists, including Izquierdo and her husband, Raúl Uribe, in *Una mujer en el arte mexicano: memorias de Inés Amor*.[13] Interviews with her close friends, including Juan Soriano and Lola Álvarez Bravo, offer some valuable insights into Izquierdo's life and career.[14] Izquierdo herself left behind an impressive publishing record, much of which is collected and reprinted in the 1986 catalogue *María Izquierdo*.[15] In my own research, I interviewed the artist's daughter, Aurora Posadas Izquierdo, at her home in Naucalpan,

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offers an engaging critical perspective on the work of María Izquierdo, particularly the artist's work of the 1930s. Her recent book, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition: Women, Gender and Representation in Mexican Art*, (Penn State University Press, 2010) examines the relationship between images of women, nationalism and modernism in Mexico City between 1850-1950, and is an important contribution to the study of women in Mexican art.

[12] Octavio Paz, "María Izquierdo, Seen in Her Surroundings and Set in Her Proper Place," in *Essays on Mexican Art*, trans. Helen Lane (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993), 246-265.

[13] Inés Amor, *Una mujer en el arte mexicano: memorias de Inés Amor,* Jorge Alberto Manrique and Teresa del Conde eds. (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1987, 2005), 46.

[14] See, for example, Elena Poniatowska's "An Interview with Juan Soriano," in *Evergreen Review* 2, no. 7 (1959); and an interview with Lola Álvarez Bravo by José Joaquín Blanco in *Lola Álvarez Bravo: Recuento fotográfico* (Mexico City: Editorial Penélope, 1982).

[15] *María Izquierdo* (México: Casa de Bolsa CREMI, 1986).

Mexico in 2006.[16] I also accessed a multi-volume artist's file, a repository of papers and contemporary newspaper clippings, housed at the Biblioteca de las Artes at El Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información de Artes Plásticas.

Major scholars have acknowledged the esteemed position that Izquierdo holds in the history of Mexican art. Her inclusion in Elena Poniatowska's *Las siete cabritas* and Raquel Tibol's *Ser y ver: Mujeres en las artes visuales*, each text claiming the rightful space of numerous women artists in the canon of Mexican modern art, reaffirmed Izquierdo's value in the cultural production of the modern era.[17] Luis-Martín Lozano proclaimed the artist, along with Tina Modotti and Frida Kahlo, one of Mexico's "*Las Tres Grandes*," a counterpart to the notorious "Three Greats" of Mexican muralism, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros.[18] Izquierdo's high rank in Mexican art is not dependent on the category of the female gender; Teresa del Conde counted Izquierdo among 'the five "masters" who symbolize the traditional principles of the Mexican School of Painting,' along with Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros, and Tamayo.[19]

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[16] I would like to acknowledge the kind assistance that María de Jesus González provided me in locating Aurora Posadas Izquierdo, and I am extremely grateful to Aurora for inviting me to her home. González's own doctoral dissertation on María Izquierdo unearthed valuable primary source material accessed through Aurora. See María de Jesus González, *The Art of Maria Izquierdo: Formative Years 1928 to 1934* (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1998).

[17] Elena Poniatowska, "María Izquierdo al derecho y al revés," in *Las siete cabritas* (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 2000), 79-100; and Raquel Tibol, "María Izquierdo," in *Ser y ver: Mujeres en las artes visuales* (Mexico: Plaza & Janés Editores, 2002), 86-105.

[18] Lozano cites Frida Kahlo, Tina Modotti, and María Izquierdo as "Las Tres Grandes" of Mexican modern art in *Mexican Modern: Masters of the 20th Century* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2006), 19.

[19] Teresa del Conde, "Self-Portraits in New York," in *Mexico: Self Portraits* (New York: Associated American Artists, 1997), 2.

Izquierdo’s art is analyzed in Adriana Zavala’s recent book, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition: Women, Gender and Representation in Mexican Art*, a much-needed critical inquiry into images of and images by women in the visual culture and fine arts between 1850-1950 in Mexico.[20] While this dissertation shares with Zavala’s book many of the same critical approaches to examining the sociohistorical context of women artists and women’s visual culture, Zavala’s book focuses on work produced by Izquierdo in the 1930s. In this dissertation, I endeavor to shed light on a period of Izquierdo’s work in the 1940s that represents significant shifts in the artist’s subject matter, style, and career activity.

Given the respective accomplishments of Izquierdo and Kahlo and their participation in Mexico City’s small art world, some scholars align directly the output of these two bold female figures. But while Izquierdo and Kahlo did cross paths, they were not close companions and their artistic endeavors were often dissimilar. Nonetheless, critical approaches to the work and life of Kahlo, particularly pertaining to the study of a woman artist grappling with issues of identity in the modern era, are often useful in examining Izquierdo as a point of comparison and context. Despite Izquierdo’s fame both in and after her lifetime, it is the legacy of Frida Kahlo that currently overshadows the work of other modern Mexican female artists. With the help of riveting accounts of her life and her work, from Hayden Herrera’s comprehensive biography to the 2002 Hollywood feature film *Frida*, “Fridamania” (as many art historians refer to the phenomenon) has captured the imagination of the world over.[21] Though Izquierdo made an even stronger name for herself as a professional painter than did Kahlo in her lifetime, Izquierdo and her work are relatively obscure outside of Mexico today.

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[20] Adriana Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition: Women, Gender and Representation in Mexican Art* (Penn State University Press, 2010).

María Izquierdo's production of the 1930s – a body of work that engages the artist's early explorations of national identity and *lo mexicano* – has received more critical attention than her mature work of the 1940s. Izquierdo's relationship with Rufino Tamayo between 1929 and 1933 and associations with the avant-garde group Los Contemporáneos have been fruitful areas of inquiry for scholars eager to establish her early circles of influence.[22] Adriana Zavala's essay on Izquierdo, included in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940,* is an insightful analysis of Izquierdo's complex position as a woman developing her professional path in the arts and the avant-garde.[23] A similar depth of analysis is needed for Izquierdo's career and output in the 1940s, a time in which Izquierdo transforms into a mature artist, an outspoken critic, and a participant in the center stage of arts in Mexico.

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[21] Hayden Herrera's doctoral dissertation, "Frida Kahlo: Her Life, Her Art" (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York Graduate Center, 1981) was later published as the overwhelmingly successful book *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), on which the 2002 film *Frida* was based. The "Fridamania" phenomenon is explored in the introduction of Margaret A. Lindauer, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo* (CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 1-12.

[22] Note, for example, Olivier Debroise's aforementioned essay on Izquierdo's relationship with Rufino Tamayo in the early 1930s in *The True Poetry: The Art of María Izquierdo*; and the doctoral dissertation of María de Jesus González, *The Art of Maria Izquierdo: Formative Years 1928 to 1934*.

[23] Adriana Zavala, "María Izquierdo," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, 67-79.

The decade of the 1940s has received short shrift not only in Izquierdo's historiography but also in Mexican modern art in general, as most studies focus exclusively on the post-Revolutionary era of the 1920s through the 1930s. Some important studies have extended their scope beyond the 1930s; a 1991 exhibition at the Museo Nacional de Arte in Mexico City looked at modernization and modern art from 1920-1960, and eight years later, Luis-Martín Lozano's exhibition catalogue on Mexican art dealt with the period 1900-1950.[24] But otherwise, a simple glance at the roster of titles of books on Mexican art after the Revolution reveals the tendency, if not the rule, to terminate studies at the year 1940.[25] Artists like Izquierdo, Kahlo, and countless others had careers that developed in the post-Revolutionary era of the 1920s and 1930s and crossed into the 1940s and 1950s. However, their output in the latter decades tends to be critically examined solely in the terms of their formative, post-Revolutionary context. Given that the Revolution is accepted to have ended by 1940, this approach limits the interpretation of any work produced after 1940 to a recycling of tropes of a bygone era. While many threads of her early production run through her entire oeuvre, it is also crucial to reconsider Izquierdo's post-1940 work within the framework of a shifting – but not extinct – project of Mexican identity formation, one that was bound up in a historical moment that ushered in an economic boon, political conservatism, international cultural exchange, and growing anxieties over the evolving roles of women in society.

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[24] See *Modernidad y modernización en el arte mexicano: 1920-1960* (Mexico City: Museo Nacional de Arte, INBA, 1991); and Luis-Martín Lozano, ed. *Mexican Modern Art, 1900-1950* (Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, 1999).

[25] The recent publication of *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* provides an insightful collection of essays on variety of aspects of Mexican culture after the Revolution. The preference to explore the two decades immediately following the Revolution, leaving the 1940s as something of an afterthought, exists in the field of Mexican history as well. Some historians, like Stephen Niblo and Michael Nelson Miller, have endeavored to correct this oversight, focusing specifically on the decade of the 1940s. See Stephen Niblo, *Mexico in the 1940s: Modernity, Politics, and Corruption* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999); Stephen Niblo, *War, Diplomacy, and Development: The United States and Mexico, 1938-1954* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1995); and Michael Nelson Miller, *Red, White, and Green: The Maturing of Mexicanidad, 1940-1946* (Southwestern Studies No. 107. El Paso: Texas Western Press, University of Texas, 1998). A valuable collection of essays that chronicle Mexican history since 1940 are found in Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein and Eric Zolov, eds. *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).

When Manuel Ávila Camacho assumed the presidency in 1940, he made it a priority to renew the cultural project of *mexicanidad* as a means to patch a divided nation, re-emphasizing national unity and identity.[26] While the language of *mexicanidad* was firmly in place as a national discourse, the Revolution of 1910 and its subsequent programmatic aims, which exerted a major influence over the spirit of the movement for the past two decades, were effectively over.[27] The nature of *mexicanidad*, then, changed in a variety of ways, both in its tone and in its dissemination. But this shift is rarely, if ever, distinguished in the art historical literature on modern Mexican art, and is never taken into consideration when discussing Izquierdo's contribution to *mexicanidad* in the 1940s. Not only is Izquierdo's religious imagery primarily and narrowly read in terms of *mexicanidad*, but it is read in the terms of a *mexicanidad* of an era passed.

In the 1940s, there was a fundamental shift in Mexican visual culture. Between the late 1930s and the early 1950s the Mexican film industry rose to become a major force in world cinema, hailed as what is known as the country's "Golden Age of

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[26] Miller, 1-3.

[27] Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein and Eric Zolov, "Assembling the Fragments: Writing a Cultural History of Mexico Since 1940," in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, 3-22.

Cinema," and Mexican constructions of collective national identity extended from the mural wall to the screen. While there is a relative lack of scholarship dedicated to the 1940s in Mexico in the fields of history and art history, film scholars since the 1990s have produced a rich sociohistorical record of the time period. Analyses of films and the film industry in this decade have been contextualized in terms of Mexico's economy, national and international politics, issues of gender and sexuality, racial identities, the construction of nationalist sentiment, and popular culture.[28] Joanna Hershfield is a leading voice in studies of Mexican cinema, particularly in relation to gender studies. Her book, *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Women, 1940-1950,* investigates the on-screen characterizations of women and how these figures functioned to mediate social debates about gender roles.[29] Andrea Noble's *Mexican National Cinema* looks at the development of the Mexican film industry through the historical and theoretical contexts of intense cultural nationalism and discourses of *mexicanidad*.[30] This body of scholarship offers art historians rich models for new avenues of inquiry into the making, imaging, and mass dissemination of Mexican national types in this decade, and has proven very useful to my own research on Izquierdo. I will demonstrate how María Izquierdo, herself something of a celebrity in the 1940s, participates in the new culture of icons both through her personal experience, and also through the iconic Virgins and well-established Mexican symbols that lie at the heart of her work in this decade.

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[28] An exhaustive history of Mexican cinema is found in Carl J. Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society, 1896-1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). Collections of critical essays, many of which pertain to Mexico's Golden Age, are found in Joanne Hershfield and David R. Maciel, eds, *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999); and John King, Ana M. López, and Manuel Alvarado, eds. *Mediating Two Worlds: Cinematic Encounters in the Americas* (London: British Film Institute Publishing, 1993). Cinematic constructions of masculinity are explored in Sergio de la Mora, *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006).

[29] Joanne Hershfield, *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Women, 1940-1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996). The author has also published a number of essays related to gender and racial identities, including Hershfield, "Race and Ethnicity in the Classical Cinema," in *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers*, 81-100.

[30] Andrea Noble, *Mexican National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

Readings of Izquierdo's work are predominantly circumscribed in the theoretical framework of *mexicanidad*, but this organizing tenet of Mexican art must be understood as a political and historically constructed notion, imagined and recorded by the male cultural elite; it ignores women, despite its claims of unity and community.[31] Ilene O'Malley, for example, documents the conscious effort, in the institutionalization of the post-Revolutionary state, to convert the heroes of the Mexican Revolution into politically homogenized macho rebels or benevolent patriarchs.[32] Such rhetoric consciously fostered a heterosexist, patriarchal, socialist machismo that constrained the private and public life of men and women alike.[33] Artists who did not fit within established patriarchal notions were edged out of the public light and, among other ramifications, conditioned a narrow view of the role of women as secondarily related to the dominant male culture. Jean Franco illuminates the fact that for centuries, from the Aztecs to the present day, "Religion, nationalism, and finally modernization … constitute the broad master narratives and symbolic systems that not only cemented society but plotted women differentially into the social text."[34] Izquierdo's work is consistently celebrated for its authentic spirit of *mexicanidad*, but it must be understood that conscription in this category, however well intentioned, firmly situates her art in a patriarchal theoretical framework. In order to appreciate fully the work of Izquierdo in the 1940s, we must first understand the bias, if not the very absence, of the representation of the female experience in the Mexican cultural narrative. As an artist intent on achieving a high position in the arts, Izquierdo worked within the patriarchal power system, using imagery in the nation's existing visual lexicon, while she also subverted the norm by pushing the envelope of representations of Mexican women's experiences and creative promise. Izquierdo's paintings and public statements were remarkable in a society in which women were so systematically marginalized and politically disenfranchised. Utilizing the foundational work of O'Malley and Franco as a basis, in conjunction with chronicles of the modern Mexican women's movement and broader feminist theories from Latin America,[35] my examination of María Izquierdo will assert the artist as an author of the

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[31] Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna: Women, Nation, and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 7.

[32] Ilene O'Malley, *The Myth of the Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State, 1920-1940* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 127-128.

[33] Edward J. McCaughan, "Gender, Sexuality and Nation in the Art of Mexican Social Movements," *Neplanta: Views from the South* 3, no. 1 (2002): 101.

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[34] Jean Franco, *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), xii. The work of Jean Franco, a literary historian, is fundamental to feminist readings of Latin American art. More research is warranted from the art historical community in examining the representation of women in art and culture.

[35] Broader cultural studies of feminism in Latin America are critical to this study. See, for example, Ana Macias, *Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982); and Shirlene Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940* (Denver, CO: Arden Press, 1990). Notably, again, these rich and important studies terminate with the year 1940. More recent anthologies grow this body of knowledge, illuminating specific segments of women and issues in Mexican culture: Jocelyn Olcott, ed., *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriella Cano, eds., *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke

Mexican woman's experience within the broad Mexican cultural narrative, and reveal the inherent challenges that this role posed.

Scholarly accounts of the troubled interaction between Church and State after the Revolution abound, but critical studies of the intersection of religion and modern art are scant. Early in the post-Revolutionary era, Mexico's religious history and culture was perceived as fundamental to the conception and creation of modern Mexican art. When Anita Brenner undertook the subject of modern Mexican art in her book *Idols Behind Altars: Modern Mexican Art and Its Cultural Roots,* published in 1929, she prefaced her discussion of contemporary artists with a detailed account of Mexico's ancient, colonial, and revolutionary history, asserting that religious and indigenous historical pulses were inextricably ingrained in Mexican culture and therefore naturally present in art production.[36] The primacy of religion as a source of inspiration, however, found opposition in the agendas of the government as well as dominant figures of Mexican muralism. Engaged in Marxist and Communist political ideas, many believed that religion was something from which Mexican thought, art, and culture needed to extricate

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University Press, 2006); and Stephanie Mitchell and Patience A. Schell, eds., *The Women's Revolution in Mexico, 1910–1953* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

[36] Anita Brenner was born in Aguascalientes, Mexico, the daughter of a Jewish emigrant from Latvia. Her family moved back and forth between Mexico and Texas, and *Idols Behind Altars* was published after her to move to New York to attend Columbia University. See Anita Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* (New York: Payson & Clarke, Ltd., 1929; reprint under the title *Idols Behind Altars: Modern Mexican Art and Its Cultural Roots,* New York: Dover, 2002).
Jean Charlot, a muralist who worked in during the inception of the movement (and, incidentally, a devout Catholic), organized his book on the Mexican Mural Renaissance, published in 1963, in manner similar to Brenner. The first three chapters of the book cover the grounds of "Indian Roots," "Colonial Roots," and "Popular Roots." Jean Charlot, *The Mexican Mural Renaissance, 1920-1925* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1963).

itself. Just as the post-Revolutionary liberal government of Mexico acted to move its populace away from backwards religiosity in order to embrace a secular modernity, so too did scholars secularize academic discourse in the past century. Historian of American art Sally Promey contends that analyses of religious content are largely absent from twentieth-century art historical scholarship in general.[37] She argues that the secularized discourse of modernity relegates religious art to the primitive and naïve (stylistically and intellectually), as opposed to the objective, distancing, and therefore sophisticated "modern" aspects of art. While she refers specifically to the scholarship of art in the United States, I believe this bias has infiltrated the writing of Mexican art history as well. Many contemporary researchers of Chicana and Latina culture investigate of the cultural experience of Catholicism and the prevalence and meanings of religious imagery, such as Our Lady of Guadalupe, and this depth of consideration merits extension to the modern Mexican era.[38] Izquierdo's images of home altars, devotional objects, and Madonna iconography are indeed telling of contemporary Mexican religious experience and warrant a critical approach that is open to that possibility.

Izquierdo, like many of her peers, did not openly identify herself as a devout Catholic. Nonetheless, Izquierdo recognized and had her own relationship with the popular form and practice of the Catholic religion in the Mexican context. Elizabeth Ferrer expresses the possibility that Izquierdo may have had a spiritual engagement with the religious symbols she painted. But while she points out the conspicuousness of the concentration of religious imagery in the 1940s, she frames these images within the conventional parameters of Izquierdo's engagement with *mexicanidad*, rather than a critical engagement with Catholicism.[39] Robin Adèle Greeley examines Izquierdo's altars and Madonnas in respect to their gendered and nationalist framework, providing an ample stage from which to launch further inquiry.[40] Luis-Martín Lozano asserts that Izquierdo's vernacular imagery of the 1940s should not be read only as images of *mexicanidad*. He, rightly, calls for an aesthetic consideration of these works.[41] But evaded still, or perhaps dismissed as irrelevant, is the Catholic, devotional experience relayed in her work. In this dissertation, I will demonstrate the ways in which Izquierdo's home altars, Madonnas, and related motifs are revelatory of the ways in which Mexicans, and women in particular, experienced religion.[42] Further, I hope to open up a consideration of Izquierdo as an adult woman negotiating her own cultural Catholic identity.[43]

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[37] Sally Promey, "The 'Return' of Religion in the Scholarship of American Art," *Art Bulletin* 85, no. 3 (2003): 581-603.

[38] A comprehensive treatment of the subject is offered in Jeanette Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: Faith and Empowerment Among Mexican-American Women* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); also Laura E. Pérez, *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

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[39] Elizabeth Ferrer, "María Izquierdo," in *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, eds. Waldo Rasmussen, Fatima Bercht and Elizabeth Ferrer (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1993), 116-121; and Elizabeth Ferrer, "A Singular Path: The Artistic Development of María Izquierdo," in *True Poetry*, 10-31. Mystical, occult allusions are considered in the 1988 catalogue essay by Lourdes Andrade, which ties Izquierdo's altars and Madonnas to the artist's 1930s encounter with surrealist Antonin Artaud, but such a correlation is problematic. Though Izquierdo's artistic engagements of the 1930s were indeed relevant to her future career, Andrade's analysis reads Izquierdo's work of the 1940s in terms of her work of the 1930s, thereby stripping the later works of their own temporal context. Lourdes Andrade, "María Izquierdo: Entre la Magía y la Conciencia Artística," in *María Izquierdo* (México, D.F.: Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, A.C., 1988), 111-119.

[40] Robin Adèle Greeley, "Painting Mexican Identities: Nationalism and Gender in the Work of María Izquierdo," *Oxford Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2000): 51-72.

[41] See Luis-Martin Lozano, "Regarding Modern Mexican Painting: María Izquierdo (1902-1955)," in *María Izquierdo, 1902-1955*, 52.

[42] Evelyn Stevens authored the landmark study of *Marianismo*, the reverence and emulation of Virgin Mary and its social consequences, in "Marianismo: The Other Face

SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

An examination of María Izquierdo's religious iconography exposes an intricate web of social constructions, and it is necessary to deal with multiple tracks of inquiry. In this dissertation, María Izquierdo is treated as the focal point for the notions of modernity, *mexicanidad*, women's issues, and Catholicism, which are so overlaid with each other that they are impossible to disentangle. By examining the critical practice that she brought to the paintings that she produced in the 1940s, I will describe how her religious iconography functioned in modern Mexican art, nationalism, and culture. This dissertation weaves a close reading of María Izquierdo's religious imagery of 1940-1948 with the socio-political landscape of religion in modern Mexico; the broader project of Mexican national identity formation in the arts; Izquierdo's interpretations of the cultural situation of women; and the artist's ambitious professional agenda.

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of Machismo," in *Confronting Change, Challenging Tradition: Women in Latin American History*, ed. Gertrude M. Yeager (Jaguar Books on Latin America, no. 7. Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc., 1994), 3-17.

[43] Scholars like Eleanor Heartney has opened up considerations of religious identity and the art of contemporary artists in the United States. See Eleanor Heartney, *Postmodern Heretics: The Catholic Imagination in Contemporary Art* (New York: Midmarch Arts Press, 2004).

In this dissertation, I use the term *mexicanidad* to refer to the post-Revolutionary construction of nationalist culture. *Mexicanidad* represents a commitment in the arts, intelligentsia, government, and other collectives that felt a stake in identifying unique national characteristics that distinguished Mexican arts, literature, craft, and culture from that of Europe and the United States. *Mexicanidad* was also construed, ideally, as a means of uniting Mexico's diverse group of citizens in the years following civil revolutionary strife. It is crucial to note that various artists and intellectual sectors debated the nature of *mexicanidad* heatedly in the post-Revolutionary era. Indeed, I argue that Izquierdo, too, endeavored to alter the scope of *mexicanidad* by challenging its patriarchal tendencies in order to open a more representative and critical space for the experience of Mexican women. Throughout the dissertation, I also speak of the "Mexican-ness" of Izquierdo's art and her self-styling. I use the term Mexican-ness to refer broadly to various culturally-coded signs and symbols that are markers of the rural, the local, religious, indigenous, historical, etc., which are employed in order to convey an authentic, unique and national identity. Mexican-ness, in this context, refers to the performative means of expressing Mexican nationalism.

For several decades following the 1910 Revolution, the Mexican government, intelligentsia, and artistic community sought to mend a nation torn apart by civil strife through a celebration of Mexico's common identity. Indigenous history, popular craft, and Catholic practice became, among other subjects, a fertile ground for expressions of authentic national identity. Izquierdo's religious imagery of the 1940s constitutes an important contribution to this movement, but there are multiple layers of meaning to be unfolded. The year 1940 marked a major transition in Mexican history and, likewise, in the art of Izquierdo. Chapter One surveys Izquierdo's developing career in the post-Revolutionary years of the 1930s, drawing out significant characteristics of *mexicanidad*, religious and gender issues related to her milieu, her work and her life, and demonstrates the shifts that each of these areas underwent after 1940. Understanding the decade of the 1940s as distinct from the era that preceded it provides an essential foundation to understanding Izquierdo's work of the 1940s.

Chapter Two argues that Izquierdo's religious imagery not only documents a vital aspect of Mexican culture, but more specifically, Mexican *women's* culture and their experience of Catholicism. Izquierdo painted many compositions of cabinets, containing Mexican toys, sweets and crafts, reminiscent of 19th century Mexican still-life genre painting. Several contain within them, as their focal point, images of the *Mater Dolorosa*, the Virgin of Sorrows. Choosing to depict the Virgin at her point of greatest suffering, Izquierdo connects both to the popular appeal of Mary and the devotee of such shrines. This chapter takes an in-depth look at the formal strategies employed in Izquierdo's paintings of domestic shrines and how they connect the viewer to Mexican women's profound relationship with the Virgin Mary, exploring both the empowerment and gendered constraints couched in her devotion. Further, through this series, Izquierdo broadens the scope of the post-Revolutionary Mexicanist visual arts project, predominantly defined by the male imagination, and paves the way for a more gynocentric view of Mexican cultural production and consumption. In so doing, Izquierdo asserts the role of women as vital carriers and creators of Mexican heritage.

Like her home altars, Izquierdo's motherhood imagery and related self-portraits of the 1940s illuminate Izquierdo's challenges in trying to write the woman into the predominantly masculine national narrative. In many of these paintings, Izquierdo appropriates traditional Catholic imagery to portray the archetypal Mexican mother. In some ways, these images challenge and subvert the traditional perception of the Virgin Mary; in another sense, the Virgin Mary model references the conventional, constrictive messages propagated by the Church and masculine culture. Chapter Three considers the apparent challenges in picturing the feminine experience within a man's cultural narrative and illuminates how Izquierdo attempts to reinvent religious iconography in order to articulate her own understanding of an empowered Mexican femininity. Beyond her intention to picture Mexican women in the nation's visual arts, Izquierdo also intended to codify the position of one particular woman – herself – into the ranks of Mexico's greatest artists and cultural public figures. Through her self-portraits, which call on associations to the universal mother, ethnic identity, and religious iconography, Izquierdo demonstrates her ambition to publicly figure herself as synonymous with Mexican culture itself. This chapter teases out parallels between the self-portraiture of Izquierdo and Frida Kahlo, demonstrating ways in which Izquierdo's self-portraiture asserted the artist's presence in a male-dominated field, positioning the artist both as the creator of important works of art as well as the object of the public gaze.

Izquierdo's evocation of the Virgin Mary in various paintings in the 1940s is one part of an oeuvre that is notably dominated by female subjects. For her subjects and for her own self, Izquierdo was intent on claiming a space of power. But such claims were not without consequences. Chapter Four investigates Izquierdo's vigorous quest for fame and the professional repercussions of the advancement of women in modern Mexican art. After the Revolution, public murals became the preeminent medium to express Mexico's art for the people. In 1945, after several years of self-promotion and capitalizing on unique professional opportunities, María Izquierdo was the first Mexican woman to be granted a major government sponsored mural commission.[44] Her preliminary sketches and early wall preparations reveal a sweeping allegory of Mexican civilization. Notably, the cycle is dominated by images of women, who are figured both as muses and as bold social and cultural leaders. When Izquierdo's commission was abruptly withdrawn before its execution, Izquierdo launched a heated public campaign criticizing the revered muralists, namely, Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who supported her ejection. Chapter Four contextualizes the famous "mural scandal" and accounts for the disparity between the all-inclusive rhetoric of *mexicanidad* and the male-ness of the national narrative of the revolutionary hero. Finally, the Epilogue considers Izquierdo's artistic output in the years immediately following the mural scandal, marking a movement away from the concrete, familiar Virgin Mary iconography that defined much of her work in the first half of the 1940s and towards a more metaphysical engagement of spirituality and the otherworldly.

Through this study, I hope to shed light on an understudied decade in Mexican art history and in this seminal cultural figure's career. I also endeavor to provide a new model for integrating readings of art and religious culture, one of the most contentious and influential forces of the twentieth century, in modern Mexican art. Izquierdo's religious imagery and related works of the 1940s merit a fresh consideration as a critical practice that engages a mature and progressive stance on women's issues; her struggle to carve out a position of power for herself in her *machismo* professional milieu; and her negotiation of Catholic iconography, approaching it not just as a passive nostalgia for her Catholic upbringing but as a seminal cultural identity that she is actively considering in her present.[45]

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[44] This fact is not to be taken lightly. The triumph of modern Mexican art was one that was perceived, then and now, to take place on the public walls of Mexico City. This seminal facet of art production was, in fact, largely dominated by "The Three Greats": Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. The famed Mexican Mural Movement had been in swing for almost twenty-five years before, finally, a Mexican woman was granted an important, highly visible commission.

While Izquierdo's work is easily viewed in terms of the post-Revolutionary project of *mexicanidad*, as well as in the shifted framework of *mexicanidad* of the 1940s, the project as a whole requires more scrutiny. Understanding its deeply masculine hegemony makes obvious how intentionally and strategically Izquierdo had to work to create a place for women and for herself in this movement. Her creative output and career development must be viewed as inter-related and sometimes conflicting tracks, rather than separate, parallel entities. An examination of Izquierdo's work situates her charged subjects of women, religiosity, ethnicity, cultural tradition, and modernity in the crosshairs of the cultural tensions of the period in which she painted. Further, close readings of her work reveal the formal practices she engaged to draw out and critique gendered, social tensions. In total, the 1940s encapsulate Izquierdo's comprehensive, forward-thinking project to advance her art, her career, and the visioning of women in modern Mexican culture.

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[45] The interpretation of Izquierdo's work as highly nostalgic is emphasized in the catalogue entry by Teresa del Conde, "Introduction: A Nostalgic Melancholy," in *María Izquierdo, 1902-1955*, 9.

CHAPTER ONE

Transitions: Tracing Izquierdo, Religion, Gender, *Mexicanidad,* and Modernity from the 1930s to the 1940s

Izquierdo's entrance in the profession of painting is marked by a constellation of fluctuating forces that charged her early career in the decade of the 1930s: success and sexism, rurality and urbanity, tradition and progress. Likewise, Mexican society, rebounding from the aftershock of the 1910-1920 Revolution, was itself in a state of flux. In a time when the meaning of Mexican national identity, the roles of women, and the power of the Catholic Church were all up for debate, Izquierdo's art and life emerge as a barometer of change.

While Mexican politics in the 1930s was characterized by a commitment to the ideals of the Revolution and extreme anticlerical legislation imposed by the government, the year 1940 signals a sharp turn in Mexican history. The presidential administration of Manuel Ávila Camacho ushered in what is accepted to be the end of the Revolutionary political program, and with it, a new era of political conservatism, relieved legal restraints on the Church, and a significant and stable economic boom. The effects of these changes in turn reverberated through Mexican culture. Just as Mexico underwent a series of changes between the 1930s and 1940s, so too did Izquierdo's artwork, and so too did Izquierdo. This chapter illuminates the shifts in Mexican culture and politics – specifically, in the artistic and nationalistic endeavor to articulate Mexican-ness*,* the country's religious climate, and gender issues – from the 1930s to the 1940s, and demonstrates how these shifts bear out in the work of Izquierdo.

COMING OF AGE

María Cenobia Izquierdo Gutiérrez was born in 1902.[1] She grew up in the quaint and picturesque town of San Juan de los Lagos, in the state of Jalisco, where she witnessed yearly colorful fairs in honor of San Juan, the town's patron saint. San Juan de los Lagos is known for its religious buildings, particularly its basilica, which houses a statue of the Virgin Mary dating back to the early 1500s and is believed to perform miracles.[2] Jalisco was a fervently Catholic region, and steeped in rigid social conventions and traditions. Carlos Monsiváis describes the character of Jalisco as possessing "a fusion of the power of the Mexican Revolution with the power of tradition" which fostered "the aesthetic consecration of peoples and customs."[3] In the twentieth century, Jalisco spawned an extraordinary number of distinguished poets, writers, and artists, including Dr. Atl (Gerardo Murillo), Roberto Montenegro, José Clemente Orozco, Jorge Enciso, Isabel Villaseñor, Carlos Orozco Romero, Jesús Guerrero Galván, and Juan Soriano, to name only a few.

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[1] Izquierdo's biographical information is summarized in many volumes. Detailed accounts are found in María de Jesus González, *The Art of Maria Izquierdo: Formative Years 1928 to 1934* (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1998), 67-74; Luis-Martin Lozano, *María Izquierdo: una verdadera pasión por el color* (México, D.F.: Americo Arte Editores: Landucci Editores: CONACULTA, 2002), 14-17; and *María Izquierdo* (México, D.F.: Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, A.C., 1988), 27.

[2] The first miracle of the Virgin statue was said to have occurred in 1623. A circus was passing through the town on its way to Guadalajara, the capital of Jalisco. They stopped for a few days, and a father in the circus was teaching his daughters stunts. One of the girls slipped, fell on a sword, and was killed. According to witnesses, when they took the girl to the chapel to prepare her for burial, the woman in charge of the chapel placed the Virgin over the dead body of the girl, and returned her back to life.

Her father died when she was five years old, and her mother was often absent, as she traveled much of the time with her second husband, a doctor. Her middle-class upbringing was largely in the charge of her pious Catholic grandmother and aunts. She spent much of her time as a child in solitude, entertaining herself in the gardens of her home, where she admired and collected insects, leaves, plants, and flowers. She recounted later in her life that the most precious moments she experienced were when she watched her father working in his jewelry shop and was able to touch, handle, and play with the jewelry her father crafted.[4]

Her formal education began when she was nine years old and continued until she was fourteen. In 1916, a girl with this much education was considered exceptional; women were generally excluded from advanced education. Despite her wishes, her family forced her to return to her proper social and familial obligations, and the duties of her role as a female.[5] When Izquierdo was fourteen, her mother announced that she had chosen the man that her daughter would marry, Candido Posadas, a member of the military and a journalist.

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[3] Carlos Monsiváis, "Culture in Jalisco: Inventions, Destructions, Achievements," in *Jalisco: Genio y Maestría* (Monterrey, Mexico: Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey, 1994), 20-23.

[4] From Izquierdo's unpublished memoir *Memorias*. Quoted in González, 68.

[5] Ibid.

Izquierdo's first exposure to the arts may have come in 1915 when it is thought that she attended the Ateneo Puente de Saltillo, where the Mexican painter Ruben Herrera taught classes.[6] In her teens, Izquierdo had been permitted to take private art lessons, as was customary for many middle-class young women. In 1923, at the age of twenty-one, María Izquierdo Posadas moved with her husband and three children to Mexico City. Candido Posadas encouraged his wife to pursue painting, perhaps considering the activity only a hobby, and also paid for her art lessons.[7] The city's art world was bustling with activity. Mural painters were covering the walls with frescoes of the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria (National Preparatory School) and the Secretaría de Educación Pública (Ministry of Education). Filmmakers Sergei Eisenstein and Edouard Tissé; writers D.H. Lawrence and Hart Crane; photographers Henri Cartier-Bresson, Paul Strand, Edward Weston, and Tina Modotti; all came to Mexico.

In 1927, Izquierdo entered the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes. The former Academy of San Carlos, ENBA was Mexico's most prestigious art institution. Through the 1910s and 1920s, ENBA underwent several curriculum and aesthetic changes that challenged its traditional academic standards.[8] Her first painting and drawing instructors,

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[6] Luis-Martin Lozano, "Regarding Modern Mexican Painting: María Izquierdo (1902-1955)," in *María Izquierdo, 1902-1955* (Chicago: Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, 1996), 20-21.

[7] González, 70.

[8] Fausto Ramírez, "The Nineteenth Century," in *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1990), 508-509.

Germán Gedovius and Alberto Garduño, facilitated her early career by allowing her to work at home.[9]

Her career in painting had a tempestuous start. Izquierdo participated in student exhibits organized in 1929 for Diego Rivera, the director of ENBA at that time. In a critique of one of these exhibitions, Rivera enthusiastically praised Izquierdo, and secured a show for her with the Galería de Arte Moderno at the Teatro Nacional, the modern-day Palacio de Bellas Artes. In the exhibition catalogue, Rivera wrote that she was a genuinely "good painter" whose painting was "self-assured and concrete" and whose talent was "balanced and ardent, yet reserved and contained." He contended that she was, both in person and in paint, "classically Mexican."[10] This recognition generated resentment among the students eager to capture Rivera's attention. Embittered by the acclaim bestowed upon one student, and a woman no less, they subsequently voted to dismiss Izquierdo from the school and physically ousted her, casting pails of water at her.[11] This backlash, however, did not thwart her creative ambitions; rather, she demonstrated sheer resolve and confidence. In this same year of 1929, Izquierdo made a decisive break from her past as she divorced her husband and launched her professional career in the vibrant artistic arena of Mexico City.

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[9] Olivier Debroise, "María Izquierdo," in *María Izquierdo*, 27.

[10] "En el caso de Maria Izquierdo, se trata de afirmar, con la prueba de su trabajo, la existencia de un buen pintor… su pintura as ante todo un valor seguro; seguro y concreto… El talento de esta pintora es equilibrado y ardiente, pero reservado y contenido… Su persona es como su pintura: clasicamente mexicana." Diego Rivera, "María Izquierdo," from the exhibition catalog, Galería de Arte Moderno, at the Teatro Nacional, Mexico City (1929). Quoted in *María Izquierdo* (México: Casa de Bolsa CREMI, 1986), 51-52.

[11] This account is referred to in several accounts of Izquierdo's early career, and given the most detail in González's aforementioned dissertation. Drawing from Izquierdo's unpublished memoirs, written in the early 1950s, she relays Izquierdo's recollection that not only was she voted out of the school, but that the students cast pails of water at her. González, 78-79; also Olivier Debroise, "The Shared Studio: María Izquierdo and Rufino Tamayo," in *The True Poetry: The Art of María Izquierdo* (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1997), 52.

THE POST-REVOLUTIONARY ERA IN MEXICO

The Project of *Mexicanidad*

The 1920s and 1930s were formative decades in which *lo mexicano*, a multi-voiced exploration of *mexicanidad*, was codified by cultural elites.[12] The concept emerged as an essential seed in the development of a modern and distinct art sensibility in Mexico in the early 1920s, and was a fundamental influence in the production of much Mexican art for at least three decades to follow. The spirit of *mexicanidad* complimented the Mexican government's efforts to unite a populace ravaged by the ten years of civil strife following the 1910 Mexican Revolution, aiming to restore the nation's pride in its own Mexican identity. Artists and intellectuals, likewise, endeavored to develop a national artistic character that was essentially Mexican in form and content, rather than primarily derivative of European influences. Part official construct, part popular narrative, the concept of *mexicanidad* became a seminal motif for artists engaged in the cultural discourse; images, language, songs, and revolutionary martyrs were woven into the new fine art consciousness.[13] The forms and lore of ancient indigenous sources, the naïve hand of the folk artist, and the sun-drenched colors of Mexico became but a few of the plastic mouthpieces of a common cultural legacy.

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[12] The concept of *mexicanidad* has been summarized in countless texts. A recent and particularly comprehensive study of the often conflicting yet coexisting manifestations of *mexicanidad* comes in Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis, eds. *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006).

While *mexicanidad* emerged as the organizing tenet of the post-Revolutionary period of art, early in its inception after the revolution, what constituted a "truly Mexican" means and mode of expression was a matter of heated debate. The modern art scene throughout the 1920s and 1930s witnessed a push and pull between various segments of vanguard expression and socio-political design, as artists sought to filter and prioritize innovative European models, ancient and contemporary local sources, and provocative social realism. Certain artists, such as muralists like Diego Rivera who gravitated to subjects of social realism, claimed that the true Mexican character was rooted in native Indian tradition. Other artists' groups dissented from this viewpoint, and instead sought to situate Mexican art in a modern, urban and international context, carefully weaving local influences with cosmopolitan trends.[14] Rufino Tamayo, who, like Rivera, held a teaching position at ENBA from 1928-1929, was drawn to the latter sensibility in his approach to painting.

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[13] Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein and Eric Zolov, "Assembling the Fragments: Writing a Cultural History of Mexico Since 1940," in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico Since 1940*, eds. Gilbert Joseph, Anne Rubenstein and Eric Zolov (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 7.

[14] Adriana Zavala, "The Big Three: María Izquierdo," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, eds. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 68.

Despite Rivera's early public praise of her work, it would be Tamayo, and not Rivera, who would have a distinct impact on Izquierdo's early artistic development.[15] Izquierdo met Tamayo at ENBA in 1928. By mid-1929 Izquierdo had separated from her husband and became romantically involved with Tamayo. The two shared a love of life and fun, which included frequenting *cantinas* and taking Izquierdo's children to the circus,[16] an activity to which Izquierdo had felt profoundly connected since her childhood, and evidenced in her series of circus paintings. The four years of their relationship were a productive and richly creative time for them both. They executed many of their paintings in a studio apartment that they rented together.[17] Paintings like Tamayo's *Naturaleza muerta con pie (Still Life with Foot)*, 1928 (fig. 1.1) took traditional table-top still life to a new realm. His juxtaposition of unlike objects – a mannequin's foot, scissors, playing cards, and a cigarette are arranged on a table before a door opening on to a hot air balloon in the sky – invite the viewer to free-associate about its meaning, much in the way that Izquierdo's *El teléfono (The Telephone)* of 1931 (fig.

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[15] Adriana Zavala argues that Rivera's adulations of Izquierdo's work in 1929 were in no small part an attempt to "claim her" for the social realist camp of painting. She notes that after November 1929, Rivera's efforts shifted to championing the art of Frida Kahlo. Ibid., 70-71.

[16] Adriana Zavala, "Tamayo's Women: Figures of an Alternative Modernism," in *Tamayo: Modern Icon Reinterpreted* (California: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 2007), 214.

[17] González, 90; and Debroise, 59. Again, Izquierdo was able to create an environment that enabled her to work and to have her children around her.

1.2), brings together unrelated items – a telephone, book, compass, lime, and thimble – to create a open-ended and innovative tableau.[18]

The work of both Tamayo and Izquierdo aligned with the ideas of Los Contemporáneos, a loosely banded group of artists, including Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, Julio Castellanos, and Agustín Lazo, and such writers as Carlos Pellicer, Andrés Henestrosa, and the brothers José and Celestino Gorostiza. The "group without a group" sought to construct a vision of *mexicanidad* that was both cosmopolitan and local, drawing from innovative trends in international modernism while imbuing their work with a distinctly Mexican essence. Their ideology hinged on inclusiveness and universality, and resisted accepting the Revolution as the master cultural narrative.[19] Izquierdo discovered new ideas through Los Contemporáneos, and she established close friendships with the critics, writers, journalists, and artists in the group. Among those who congregated at her home were Concha Michel, Aurora Reyes, Graciela Arnador, Lupe Marin, Xavier Villaurrutia, Roberto Montenegro, Manuel and Lola Álvarez Bravo, Luis Cardoza Aragon, Juan Soriano, Jorge Cuesta, Andres Henestrosa and Alí Chumancero.[20] Her friendships with these creative men and women flourished during the many gatherings she held in her home. The gatherings she hosted were like *salons*, and constituted an open intellectual environment and a common commitment to art. They discussed literature, their works in progress, or they came together to paint; they talked, sang, and drank together. They mutually benefited from one another's individualism, ideas, and support. Izquierdo's gatherings became the stuff of legend. "I never missed one of Maria Izquierdo's orgies," later recalled Juan Soriano in an interview with Elena Poniatowska, "and there I met Xavier Villaurrutia, Rafael Solana, and the two Chavez Morados and all my old friends. Maria's parties always wound up at the Tenampa bar, where we talked about our home state of Jalisco, listened to the mariachis and drank *granada* punch."[21]

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[18] Adriana Zavala, *Un Arte Nuevo: El Aporte de María Izquierdo/A New Art: The Contribution of María Izquierdo* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2008), 43.

[19] Salvador A. Oropresa, *The Contemporáneos Group: Rewriting Mexico in the Thirties and Forties* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 4-6.

[20] From an interview with Izquierdo's children Aurora and Carlos; see González, 41.

For María Izquierdo, Antonieta Rivas Mercado, Lola Álvarez Bravo, and other women affiliated with the group, Los Contemporáneos provided access to Mexico's cultural and intellectual world. However, there were in fact few women connected to the group, and "those women who sought the group's support found it difficult to obtain. … Although Los Contemporáneos appeared to lend their support to women, their patronage was limited and restricted."[22] It was therefore a tremendous success for Izquierdo to break into one of the first issues of the journal *Contemporáneos*, which ran from 1928 to 1931. Four of Izquierdo's paintings were reproduced in the September 1929 issue, and in the years to follow, several prominent writers associated with the group composed essays inspired by Izquierdo's paintings.[23] José Gorostiza noted in Izquierdo's work an

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[21] Elena Poniatowska, "An Interview with Juan Soriano," *Evergreen Review* 2, no. 7 (1959): 143.

[22] González, 51-52.

[23] Zavala, "The Big Three: María Izquierdo," 70-71, 74. The journal *Contemporáneos* endeavored to cover a broad span of arts, literature and culture, both historical and current, and both national and international.

"extraordinary sense of color" that she owed to "the indigenous popular arts,"[24] and Celestino Gorostiza, summarizing both Izquierdo's innovation and the aesthetic ambition of Los Contemporáneos, stated that her paintings manifested a "national expression of personal preoccupations in a universal atmosphere."[25] In November 1930, Izquierdo's work was exhibited at the Art Center in New York City, where she became the first Mexican woman to have a solo art exhibition in the United States.

Drawing inspiration from a variety of sources, melding European influences with the contemporary trends and historical precedents of Mexico, Izquierdo cultivated a unique style that elegantly responded to the various currents that nourished *mexicanidad*. She painted in a naïve style that was at once traditional and thoroughly modern. Through the 1930s, she primarily worked in a limited, earthy palette dominated by browns and ochres, punctuated with deep blues and harsh reds, washes of color and line applied in harsh striations that lend the works a look of rough woodcuts or etchings. She cultivated a number of themes that she would repeat through the decade, from popular images drawn from the circus and fairs, rural life, and religious traditions, to more ambiguous, allegorical and mystical scenes.

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[24] "…ese extraordinario sentido del color que María Izquierdo, tan mexicana, he debido heredar de las artes populares indígenas." José Gorostiza, "La pintura de María Izquierdo," *Exposición de Acuarelas y Oleos de María Izquierdo* (1933). Quoted in *María Izquierdo - Monografía* (Mexico: Departmento de Bellas Artes, Gobierno de Jalisco, 1985), 67.

[25] "Esto por lo que se refiere a la característica mexicana… la expresión nacional de inquietudes personales en un ambiente universal." Celestino Gorostiza, "María Izquierdo, pintora mexicana," *El Universal Gráfico*, November 1933. Quoted in *María Izquierdo* (Mexico: Casa de Bolsa CREMI, 1986), 31.

In small watercolor and gouache works on paper, Izquierdo's scenes effectively capture rural Mexico and yet, simultaneously, are devoid of time and place. A work like *Dos mujeres, dos caballos y columnas* (*Two Women, Two Horses, and Columns*) of 1932 (fig. 1.3) demonstrates the elusiveness of her work of the 1930s. It is neither day nor night; the figures are heavy and solid, yet float above an undefined ground. Women, animals, and architectural ruins participate equally in a nebulous allegory. Octavio Paz calls attention to the influence of European modernists on Izquierdo as well as her Contemporáneos cohort, noting that in her work "there are traces of the horses and the architectural structures of Chirico."[26] The paintings of the Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978), founder of a metaphysical art movement, became known in Mexico by the late 1920s, as several of his paintings were reproduced in the August 1928 issue of *Contemporáneos*.[27] Izquierdo also likely encountered his works during her own visit to New York in 1930.[28] Indeed, de Chirico's inventive juxtaposition of objects, deserted townscapes, horses, and classical architecture themes all echo in the work of Izquierdo in the 1930s.

Acknowledging her attention to international sources, Paz also asserts the locality of Izquierdo's images, noting that she, like any other child of the provinces, grew up amongst horses, not to mention that Mexico's popular mythology is "full of horses." The fragments of columns and arcades that populate so many of her pictures of the 1930s "are not those of ruins in Italy but the ones that can still be seen in many small towns in Mexico."[29] Part of the success of Izquierdo's work at this time lay in the extent to which she imparted her paintings with both a sense of the local and of the universal. In her watercolors of the 1930s, Izquierdo managed to evince an essence of Mexico without simply repeating its forms, which made her work especially appealing to Los Contemporáneos. There is a legible Mexican-ness in her work, as Paz interprets, and yet it is also arguable, as Adriana Zavala notes, that there is nothing in particular in Izquierdo's paintings – be it the horses, the landscape, the people, etc. – that is uniquely or distinctly Mexican.[30]

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[26] Octavio Paz, "Loners and Independents," in *Essays on Mexican Art*, trans. Helen Lane (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993), 242. José Gorostiza also recognized in Izquierdo's work the influence of Giorgio de Chirico and her fascination with horses. J. Gorostiza, "La pintura de María Izquierdo," *Monografia*, 69.

[27] Elizabeth Ferrer, "A Singular Path: The Artistic Development of María Izquierdo," in *The True Poetry: The Art of María Izquierdo* (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1997), 24.

[28] Dore Ashton, "Surrealism and Latin America," in *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1990), 112.

In a similar manner, Izquierdo's watercolors also captured a charged space between the real and the fantastic. Izquierdo incorporates popular Mexican Catholic symbols into many paintings of the 1930s, and elevates their mystical, universal qualities via the ambiguous scenes in which they are placed. *Consolación (Consolation)* of 1933 (fig. 1.4) is set indoors, but utilizes the same earthy browns and ochres of her landscapes. In this scene, a nude woman, clearly bereft with her hands covering her face, is prostrate on the floor, while another nude woman drapes a white sheet over her. A short, bright red column, perhaps a phallic symbol, stands without apparent purpose in the room. Blurring the lines between the worldly and the otherworldly, a winged angel, perched on the sill of an open window, sounds a horn, an instrument which appears in several other of Izquierdo's paintings. In accordance with biblical scriptures, the angel signals the delivery of news; whether this symbol in Izquierdo's painting alludes to the trumpet sounding of the Last Judgment or the announcement of a birth is unknown, but it is clear that the angel's revelation is the source of this woman's great distress. The ambiguity of the actions and reactions of each of the characters in the scene charges Izquierdo's painting with a degree of anxiety. "The watercolors of María," wrote José Gorostiza, "seem to respond to questions that she herself doesn't know, to such uncertain worries, fears, and psychic movements, that they don't even reach a point to condense into questions."[31]

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[29] Paz, "María Izquierdo, Seen in Her Surroundings and Set in Her Proper Place," in *Essays on Mexican Art*, 263-264.

[30] Zavala, "The Big Three: María Izquierdo," 76.

Religion After the Revolution, A Dividing Issue

Growing up in the staunchly religious town of San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, Izquierdo was entrenched in the spectacle of Catholicism, from daily rituals to spectacular annual festivals. Her grandmother and aunt, who were responsible for much of her upbringing, were extremely pious, and young María was expected to follow in their faith. Izquierdo notably broke with the course that was charted for her from a young age when she divorced her husband, carried on an out-of-wedlock relationship, and raised her three children as a single, working professional. No less, Izquierdo revisited the rich religious symbolism of her youth throughout her career.

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[31] "Las acuarelas de María parecen responder a preguntas que ella misma no conoce, a inquietudes, sobresaltos, movimientos psíquicos tan inciertos, que no llegan siquiera a condensarse en preguntas." J. Gorostiza, "La pintura de María Izquierdo," in *Monografía*, 68.

Religious images were ubiquitous throughout Mexican modern art, as artists and writers on art sought to legitimize and historicize contemporary art through direct and inherent lines to past traditions. Mexico's rich religious heritage stemmed from indigenous pre-Conquest practices and Western Catholicism, and these threads blended in popular practice throughout the Colonial era. Their respective rituals and visual culture provided a fertile ethos for both the creation of art and for writing about art in the modern era. Anita Brenner argues in her landmark book, *Idols Behind Altars: Modern Mexican Art and Its Cultural Roots*, that modern Mexicans and their art cannot be fully understood without a firm grasp of their history, particularly as it relates to religion.[32] The first half of her book provides a people's history in prose, chronicling the ancients, the Conquest, and Spanish missionaries, illustrating the steady and complex entwinement of race, religion, and state. Brenner thoughtfully makes this case before moving on to an analysis of modern art, making explicit her view that Mexican art is inextricable from, if not predetermined by, its historical and religious roots.

Catholicism is taken as a simple and silent given in Mexican culture, but in fact, Catholic practice, identity, and Church and state relations were a volatile site of conflict throughout the revolutionary era. While the armed phase of the Revolution is noted to have ended in 1920, the following two decades witnessed an open, heated, and often physical fight between the liberal presidential administrations and various Christian organizations founded on principles of religious freedom.[33] While modern artists embraced images of folk religious practices on the canvas, those very practices were being actively and even violently suppressed.

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[32] Anita Brenner was the daughter of a Latvian Jewish emigrant to Mexico. She was born in Aguascalientes, Mexico in 1905, and lived between San Antonio, TX and Mexico until the age of twenty-two. She left Mexico for Columbia University in 1927, and *Idols Behind Altars* was published in New York two years later. Anita Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* (New York: Payson & Clarke, Ltd., 1929; reprint under the title *Idols Behind Altars: Modern Mexican Art and Its Cultural Roots,* New York: Dover, 2002).

The political ideology that emerged with the 1910 Revolution was one enriched by a mixture of radical nineteenth century liberalism, scientific positivism, and socialism; tolerance of the political and social powers of the Catholic Church had no place in post-Revolutionary administrations. Provisions in the 1917 Constitution sharply restricted the Catholic Church, and were duly enforced by the government of Álvaro Obregón between 1920 and 1924. As part of the state's mission to outlaw religious education and eliminate clerical influence, a cultural program was adopted to instruct the masses on the laws and ideals to the new Constitution. José Vasconcelos, a noted intellectual who was sympathetic of the revolutionary program, was appointed Secretary of Public Education. It was under his leadership a new team of teachers would be trained and sent out into rural communities to replace the clergy in the role of educating the people, a vocation that was visually codified in the 1923 mural *The New School* by Diego Rivera located in the Court of Labor cycle at the Ministry of Education (fig. 1.5) and re-adapted in a 1932 lithograph (fig. 1.6). Rivera juxtaposes *campesinos*, an armed peasant, and a female teacher with her pupils, a group that includes both young and old, men and women. This education, or re-education, of the masses represents a new kind of freedom, one gained through revolution.[34] Throughout the country, revolutionary teachings and festivals substituted Catholic rites and rituals, as the government actively attempted to destroy the backwardness and religious "fanaticism" of the populace and create a new, modern society. The ultimate goal was to forge "new men" and a revolutionary, civil religion whereby the socialist state replaced the role of the Church.[35]

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[33] A particularly bloody and publicized account of the assassinations of Father Miguel Agustín Pro Juárez and three other members of the Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa. A montage of photographs of the executions filled the front page of *Excelsior* on November 24, 1927. These photographs are examined in the essay by Nasheli Jiménez del Val, "El martirio del Padre Pro," in *Los Pinceles de la Historia: La Arqueología del Régimen, 1910-1955* (Mexico: CONACULTA, INBA, 2003), 107-114.

Reacting to the spread of socialist teachings sanctioned by the government, clandestine Catholic schools worked rapidly to instruct students to fight back against the liberals. By 1923, Catholic leaders published *El Obrero*, a journal dedicated to denouncing socialism and inciting strategies of defense.[36] Throughout the 1920s, numerous Catholic social action organizations were formed, and particularly Catholic regions, such as Izquierdo's home province of Jalisco, organized massive and sustained protests against the government's anticlerical policies.[37]

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[34] Desmond Rochfort, *Mexican Muralists: Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993), 55.

[35] Adrian Bantjes, "Idolatry and Iconoclasm in Revolutionary Mexico: The De-Christianization Campaigns, 1929-1940," *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 13, no. 1 (1997): 88.

[36] Robert E. Quirk, *The Mexican Revolution and the Catholic Church, 1910-1929* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986; reprint, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1973), 125-135.

[37] "Su catolicismo social se tradujo en sindicatos católicos, organizaciones civiles como la Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa, la Asociación Católica de la Juventud Mexicana (ACJM), la Asociación de Damas Católicas, los Caballeros de Colón, la Federación Arquidiocesana del Trabajo, así como diversas congregaciones marianas." Amanda Hernández Pérez, "Peregrinación de Tacubaya a la Villa de Guadalupe, 1927," in *Los Pinceles de la Historia: La Arqueología del Régimen, 1910-1955* (Mexico: CONACULTA, INBA, 2003), 133. A discussion of Jalisco's role in the opposition of government reforms can be found in Jean Meyer, "An Idea of Mexico: Catholics in the Revolution," in *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 284.

Through the 1920s, the government's anticlerical restrictions on the Church and repression of Catholicism in the country escalated. In turn, grassroots movements emerged to counter the government's actions. Jalisco was a key site in the struggle between the anticlerical government and the religious populace. In 1927, "Jalisco's Catholic lay organizations successfully used mass pilgrimages, economic boycotts, public marches, and civil disobedience to force the state government not to apply article 130," a constitutional article that would force the subordination of the church to the state.[38]

Finally, in 1926, a brutal and sustained civil conflict began, waged by Catholic peasants against the federal army. *La Cristiada*, or the Cristero Rebellion, endured until 1929 in rural centers of resistance throughout the country, including Jalisco.[39] While some contend that the Cristero rebels were primarily poor farmers who did not fully understand the complexities of the church-state conflict, the power of the Catholic Church could not be underestimated in this time of apparent socialist *callista* domination. In 1928 the assassination of President-elect Obregón by Catholics kept the church and state conflict at a fever pitch.[40]

The government's staunch repression of the Catholic Church took new shape with the administration of President Lazaro Cárdenas, who served his six-year term from 1934 to 1940. Convinced that Catholicism remained an impediment to the progress of achieving the nation's revolutionary goals, Cárdenas ushered in an era of "systematic De-Christianization campaigns." According to Adrian Bantjes, the campaigns were specifically levied toward the peasantry; the illiterate, reliant on images as texts, were, in the eyes of the educated elite, susceptible to the "seduction of idolatry," and women, Indians and children were likewise considered vulnerable to the "intoxication of fanaticism."[41]

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[38] Meyer, "An Idea of Mexico: Catholics in the Revolution," 286.

[39] The conflict is thoroughly analyzed in Jean Meyer's classic three-volume text, *La Cristiada* (Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1979).

[40] Shirlene Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940* (Denver, CO: Arden Press, 1990), 98, 115.

The friction between the Catholic Church and the liberal government was not a distant matter of higher-level difference of opinion; repressive laws levied against the church did not only affect those in power but were necessarily acted out upon entire communities. Few states were unscathed by the anticlerical legislation, discrimination against Catholics, and socialization of education instituted by the Cárdenas administration. Cárdenas is recognized for bringing about dramatic educational growth, as the number of rural schools, rural schoolteachers (mostly women), and rural pupils doubled during his presidency.[42] But, consistent with his socialist philosophy, Catholic education was all but eliminated in the nation's schools.

Iconoclastic measures taken by the government and revolutionary elite were swift and aggressive. Countless names of towns, *barrios*, streets and shops with religious connotations were changed, often to the name of a revolutionary hero; "even personal greetings with a religious meaning, such as *adiós,* were outlawed in Tabasco."[43]

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[41] Bantjes, 94.

[42] Soto, 122.

[43] Bantjes, 99-100. The word *adiós*, meaning "goodbye" or "farewell," is a contraction of *a* (to) and *Dios* (God). The term derives from the old Spanish phrase *A Dios vais*, "You're going to God."

Religious processions, dances, pilgrimages, bell ringing, offerings to the dead, and other forms of "external worship" were outlawed and stopped when possible. In Bátuc, Sonora, rural teachers even tried to halt funeral processions.[44] Images of saints from churches, seminaries, Catholic schools, and private homes were burned. In efforts to suppress their communities' grand and popular religious festivals, the revolutionary elite sought to replace them with civic "cultural Sundays" or "patriotic festivals."[45]

The height of Cárdenas's De-Christianization campaigns subsided by the year 1936, but not without leaving a trail of destruction in its wake. By 1935, Church buildings were nationalized and many were re-dedicated to non-religious purposes, such as schools, government offices, or granaries, and only 305 legally registered priests were left in all of Mexico. Ultimately, Cárdenas was forced to realize that the stamina and fervor of the Catholic resistance was itself a danger to the success of the state's revolutionary program. By the late 1930s the government saw that it was easier to convince the populace to go along with their political aims if they allowed for the practice of Catholicism and kept their anticlerical sentiments out of the public eye.[46] While a new patriotism and cultural nationalism did take root in Mexico as a result of these campaigns, it did not succeed in curbing the Church's political and social power or in eradicating Catholicism in the Mexican consciousness.

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[44] Ibid., 104.

[45] Ibid., 101.

[46] Ibid., 100, 106, 118.

Around 1933, Izquierdo painted a cluster of works on paper that recalls Mexican religious rites. *Cortejo funébre (Funeral Procession)* (1933) (fig. 1.7), *Velorio (Wake)* (1933) (fig. 1.8), and *Calvario (Calvary/Torment)* (1933) (fig. 1.9) each portray a stage of funereal rites, where mourners in a rural setting weep and pray before coffins and crosses. The paintings were very much in step with the currents of *mexicanidad,* which endeavored to capture seminal elements of a shared experience; they may recall episodes witnessed in Izquierdo's childhood in the deeply religious state of Jalisco. As testaments to the pain, loss and grief of Mexico's people, they are also consistent with the Revolution's visual narrative. Several works by José Clemente Orozco reinforce this point. In Orozco's haunting canvas *El muerto* (*The Dead*) of 1925-28 (fig. 1.10), rows of anonymous women veiled in black keep watch over a swathed corpse. Izquierdo portrays a similar scene in *Velorio*, where a woman in half profile, robed in a dark veil of mourning, prays before a coffin bordered by four candles. Izquierdo's *Calvario* – in which a woman, with her back to the viewer, kneels in prayer before the door of a mausoleum – evokes the spirit of profound grief captured in Orozco's lithograph *El requiem* (*The Requiem*), 1928 (fig. 1.11). Orozco's murals, drawings, and lithographs of this period strove to articulate the horrors of the 1910 Revolution.[47]

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[47] Anna Indych-López, *Muralism without Walls: Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros in the United States, 1927-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), 45-74. Indych-López discusses Orozco's series of drawings (and subsequent lithographs) entitled "Horrores" in her book *Muralism without Walls: Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros in the United States, 1927-1940.* The series of drawing was deemed too potent to show to Mexican audiences, for "(t)heir graphic potency made viewers relive the Revolution, whereas the ENP murals had a temporal ambiguity; the scenes depicted in the drawings are clearly of the Revolution, not before or after." Ibid., 46. The lithographs, based on the drawings, were intended to promote his work in the United States. Indych-López notes that *El requiem* closely relates to his third floor murals at the ENP. Ibid., 66.

Works by Izquierdo like *Cortejo funébre, Velorio,* and *Calvario* reflect the suffering produced by years of relentless civil strife through the 1910s and late 1920s in Mexico. They also capture public and private spiritual rituals that were aggressively challenged in this moment in Mexican history. But further, Izquierdo ties these images of longstanding tradition and current events to progressive modern art-making.

Velorio shares common elements to Orozco's *El muerto* – a mourning woman praying before the dead – but in the composition Izquierdo also includes a box-like shape and a guitar. With this, the scene of mourning transforms into a collection of unrelated objects; the stilled life of a person is incorporated into a modern still life, *naturaleza muerta*. *Calvario* also tests the thin boundary between stark reality and the otherworldly. The woman, kneeling in prayer before the coffins, is accompanied by a horse. The animal's presence would be commonplace in a rural setting, further authenticating Izquierdo's document of Mexican experience. But before the horse lies a fragment of a red column, and this combination of horses, columns, and townscapes directly relates to Izquierdo's attraction to the metaphysical works of de Chirico and to more enigmatic subjects as those that Izquierdo explored in *Dos mujeres, dos caballos y columnas* (fig. 1.3) and *Consolación* (fig. 1.4). Izquierdo's religious subjects of 1933 are situated in a complex historical moment, just a few years beyond the Cristero movement and the people's fight for preservation of religious ritual, and on the eve of yet another significant wave of De-Christianization campaigns under Cárdenas. Incorporating modern visual experimentation with timely social realist themes, Izquierdo tests notions of tradition and progress, and of the past and modernity.

By the mid-1930s Izquierdo began developing works that explored a cross-section between religious symbolism, sorrow, and women's experience, such as *Mujer y cruz (Woman and Cross)* (1933) (fig. 1.12) and *Tristeza (Sadness)* (1934) (fig. 1.13). While these images incorporate the intense sorrow and Catholic iconography seen in her funereal scenes, these works are even less specific in their physical locations and reasons for grieving. These paintings of nude women collapsed before crosses and convulsing with tears convey a more universal expression of pain and sorrow, consistent with the ideology of Los Contemporáneos. They connect neither with the popular masses not the anticlerical government; they allude to faith and mysticism, but keep a cool distance from specific Mexican traditions. What is most striking in the development of this theme over the years is the frequency of the representation of women in states of extreme desperation and suffering.

Gender Issues

Catholics and women grappled with their identities and sought a place in the national discourse in post-Revolutionary Mexico, a time in which anticlericalism was the norm and the feminist movement was in its infancy. Women in particular were in a double-bind, as the institutions of both state and Church shared a conception of appropriate gender codes that permeated Mexican society. Motivations differed, but it was in the interests of both the Church and the state that the role of women in society remained bound by the home. The urban environment of Mexico City was no exception; across the country, rural or urban, women lived by the codes of the patriarchal order, and were expected to be the center of the family and the keepers of tradition.[48] This role was codified both in religion and in patriotism. In his project to revolutionize public education for both men and women, José Vasconcelos commissioned the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral to write *Lecturas para mujeres* (1922-24) as "an attempt to meet this public's general need for positive literature on maternity and on the home."[49] Mistral wrote that "*For me, the form of feminine patriotism is perfect maternity* (her emphasis). The most patriotic education that is given to a woman is, therefore, that which accentuates the sense of family."[50] A woman who fulfilled her duties in the home could be assured that she was fulfilling her duties to God and to her country.

The Revolution of 1910 is acknowledged for opening up new roles for women in Mexican society, as women fought by men's side as *soldaderas* (soldiers) during the conflict, and participated in the post-Revolutionary educational missions as *maestras* (teachers). These roles, however, were not by any means free of gendered restrictions and expectations. The women who participated in the Revolution were also cooks, nurses, and were expected to offer themselves sexually to the male revolutionary heroes.[51] The goal of José Vasconcelos in recruiting women into his rural literacy campaigns was not only to create a new sector for women but also to "alter education itself by giving it a more maternal image." Teachers sent on these rural missions "were expected to be unmarried and chaste, (and) they had little expectations of rising in their profession."[52] Progress for women was consistently challenged, as patriarchal systems and privilege still prevailed. As David Craven notes, Izquierdo's success in art school was a testament to the gains women had achieved after the Revolution, yet her subsequent treatment showed just how far women were from emancipation.[53]

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[48] Soledad Loaeza, "Mexico in the Fifties: Women and Church in Holy Alliance," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 3&4 (2005): 143.

[49] Elizabeth Horan, *Gabriela Mistral: An Artist and Her People* (Washington DC: Interamer 33 Cultural Series, OAS, 1994), 109.

[50] "*Para mí, la forma del patriotismo femenino es la maternidad perfecta.* La educación más patriótica que se da a la mujer es, por lo tanto, la que acentúa el sentido de la familia." Gabriela Mistral, *Lecturas Para Mujeres* (Mexico: Editorial Porrúa, S.A., 1967; reprint of 1922-1924 edition), xviii. It is important to note that Mistral was a lesbian and did not have children; her statements about "perfect maternity," then, further illuminate the restrictive imagination and vocabulary for defining women's experience.

[51] Joanna Hershfield, *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Women, 1940-1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 26; and Ilene O'Malley, *The Myth of the Revolution: Hero Cults*

The rhetoric to emerge from the Revolution was conflicted. On the one hand, it promised sweeping social transformation based on a sense of inclusiveness across race, class and gender; on the other, the story of this social transformation was told through a firmly entrenched male-centered historical narrative, constituting "a discourse that associated virility with social transformation in a way that marginalized women at the very moment they were, supposedly, liberated."[54] No less, women in this era effectively organized and formulated critiques of the pervasive inequality of the sexes in society.[55]

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and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State, 1920-1940 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 134-135.

[52] Jean Franco, *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 103.

[53] David Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 36.

[54] Franco, 102.

[55] Francesca Miller, *Latin American Women and the Search for Social Justice* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991), 71-72.

They pressed the government on multiple issues, ranging from education, family legislation, suffrage, anti-alcohol, poverty and social assistance for mothers.[56]

In spite of the conservative role endorsed for women in Mexican society, Izquierdo challenged this notion both in her own life and in the way that she represented women in her paintings in the 1930s. In 1929, the same year that Izquierdo was driven out of the Escuela de Bellas Artes, she also broke with the traditional, Catholic life she had led until that point. Concurrent with falling in love with Rufino Tamayo, she separated from and divorced Candido Posadas, her husband and father of their three children.[57] The decision to divorce could not have been an easy one for Izquierdo in this era, even in the relatively progressive urban setting of Mexico City. But while conservative social attitudes toward women generally prevailed in Mexico, internationally, the 1920s ushered in new lifestyle alternatives for the modern woman. Magazines and films from the U.S. and Europe illustrated to Mexican women the "New Woman"; she was youthful and sexual, she smoked, drank, wore the latest progressive fashions, and enjoyed her relative independence. "Women's pages" in Mexico's newspaper dailies, magazines targeted to women, and cinema all presented images of modern women that were both "transnational" and local, unfamiliar and familiar, manifesting the era's impulse to be both traditionally Mexican and modern.[58] Izquierdo took full advantage of the New Woman sensibility that these modern times availed to her: city life, avant-garde intellectual circles, a romantic relationship of her own choosing, and the freedom to express herself and pursue her career in art on her own terms.

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[56] Several recent anthologies illuminate the issues and actions pertaining to specific populations of women in modern Mexican culture: Jocelyn Olcott, ed. *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriella Cano, eds. *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Stephanie Mitchell and Patience A. Schell, eds. *The Women's Revolution in Mexico, 1910–1953* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

[57] The reasons for the divorce are not spelled out in any sources, though it is fair to assume that the timing of her meeting Rufino Tamayo and the promise that her new profession held for her must have been catalysts for the split. María de Jesús González, who conducted extensive interviews with the artist's daughter, Aurora Posadas Izquierdo, relays that Izquierdo's relationship with Posadas remained cordial and he continued to provide her and the children with financial support. González, 79.

Izquierdo certainly looked the part of a young, progressive woman. A photograph of Izquierdo taken around 1932 reveals the artist's confidence, sensuality, and modernity (fig. 1.14). She wears form-fitting fashions, and her hair is tucked into a stylish cap; a large bracelet, earrings, and make-up heighten her glamour. Her hands sit on her waist just over her hips, a pose that conveys a sassy attitude while it also draws attention to her curvy figure. Rufino Tamayo portrayed Izquierdo in a similar manner in his *Retrato de María Izquierdo (Portrait of María Izquierdo)* of 1932 (fig. 1.15). Her tilted cap, tight black skirt, and thinly drawn eyebrows are captured in the portrait; Izquierdo wears white gloves, and a lit cigarette rests on the arm of the chair in which Izquierdo sits.[59]

Octavio Paz first met María Izquierdo in 1938 at the Café París, one of the centers of literary and artistic life in Mexico City. Because of the way she dressed, he recalls, mixing and moving between the latest international trends and traditional Mexican garb,

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[58] Joanna Hershfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna: Women, Nation, and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 5-6. Also, María Jesus González reports that Izquierdo was a faithful subscriber to Vogue magazine. González, 76.

[59] Adriana Zavala, "Tamayo's Women: Figures of an Alternative Modernism," in *Tamayo: Modern Icon Reinterpreted* (California: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 2007), 215.

Izquierdo was a "center of attraction."[60] She was a self-styled Mexican bohemian, with a face painted up "like a mask," according to Ines Amor,[61] in shades of red and ochre that she created, dramatically lined brows and bright, round lips. Her friend Lola Álvarez Bravo described her as a "happy and popular woman" who "liked everything popular and directly Mexican… María's delight in the popular was not as an onlooker, she seemed part of it."[62] She was a trendsetter at the Café París, among the first to wear typical provincial clothing, rich bordered *rebozos* (shawls), and flowers in her hair, and preceded Frida Kahlo in being an artist typified not only by her art but also by her public image (fig. 1.16).[63]

Although Izquierdo led an alternative lifestyle, she did not abandon her role as a mother; rather, she adapted it. Her children were always around her when Tamayo and fellow artists came to her apartment to paint, discuss their work, and socialize.[64] Soon after Izquierdo's relationship with Rufino Tamayo ended in 1933, a painful break-up for them both,[65] her friend Lola Álvarez Bravo, recently divorced from her husband, photographer Manuel Álvarez Bravo, moved into Izquierdo's apartment. In those days, two single women living together would have raised suspicions, but this fact did not unnerve these women, as they lived together for almost five years.[66] Each of them, emerging from failed relationships with successful, creative men, was able to turn to each other and to their broader artistic communities for support, while maintaining the freedom and determination to forge their lives and careers on their own terms. Álvarez Bravo later commented: "At this time, in the mid-1930s, we women who worked and managed to do something, and who were respected in our field and for our efforts, were very few. Not because one needed much bravery in order to do it, but because what it really required was decisiveness. There was no persecution against women; even so, we caused a bit of a scandal."[67]

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[60] Octavio Paz, "María Izquierdo, Seen in Her Surroundings and Set in Her Proper Place," in *Essays on Mexican Art*, 249.

[61] "Su cara parecía una máscara de tanto como se pintaba…" Inés Amor, *Una mujer en el arte mexicano: memorias de Inés Amor,* Jorge Alberto Manrique and Teresa del Conde eds. (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1987, 2005), 54.

[62] Lola Álvarez Bravo, "Transcurso con amigos," interview with José Joaquín Blanco in *Lola Álvarez Bravo: recuento fotográfico* (Mexico City: Editorial Penélope, 1982), 104.

[63] Olivier Debroise, "De la pintura como un chantaje sentimental," in *Figuras en el Trópico, Plástica Mexicana 1920-1940* (Barcelona: Ediciones Océano, 1984), fn, 168.

[64] González, 41.

Two paintings by Izquierdo in particular situate this New Woman, and by extension, herself and Álvarez Bravo, in her contemporary environs. In *Desnudo con*

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[65] In late 1933, Tamayo's relationship with Izquierdo ended when he met and, within months, married Olga Flores Rivas in February 1934. The break-up between Tamayo and Izquierdo was very painful for them both. Raquel Tibol writes that the paintings of Izquierdo between 1933 and 1938 were infused with a sense of suffering. See Ingrid Suckaer, "Biographical Nuances," *Tamayo*, ed. Teresa del Conde, trans. Andrew Long and Luisa Panichi (Boston: Little, Brown, 2000), 181; and Raquel Tibol, "María Izquierdo," in *Ser y ver: Mujeres en las artes visuales* (Mexico: Plaza & Janés Editores, 2002), 91.

[66] Elizabeth Ferrer, *Lola Álvarez Bravo* (New York: Aperture Foundation, 2006), 16.

[67] "En esa época, mediados de los treinta, las mujeres que trabajábamos y lográbamos hacer algo, y que nos respetaran dentro de nuestro trabajo y por nuestro esfuerzo, éramos muy pocas. No porque se necesitara mucho valor para hacerlo, pues no había persecución contra las mujeres, aun que sí causábamos un poco de escándolo; sino porque lo que de veras se requería era mucha decisión." Lola Álvarez Bravo quoted in Raquel Tibol, "Lola Álvarez Bravo," in *Ser y ver: Mujeres en las artes visuales*, 74.

mandolina (Nude with Mandolin), 1935 (fig. 1.17), a woman serenades the cityscape from her open window. She herself embodies a classic artistic trope: the nude, playing a musical instrument, represents the muse. At the same time, she is the musician, the creator of the music, just as Izquierdo, the artist, is the creator of the painting. Izquierdo's identity as a professional painter, independent of male figures like her art teachers and Rufino Tamayo, was solidified by this point in time. With her income as an art teacher in the Department of Fine Arts with the Ministry of Education from 1932-1937,[68] she was the first woman in Mexico to make a professional career out of painting.

In a related composition, *Desnudo (Nude)* of 1938 (fig. 1.18), a seated nude woman rests her head on the sill of her open window. The power lines that streak the sky set her in the modernized city. Playing cards are stacked on the table in front of her, and cigarettes, a book, and an alarm clock are near her on the floor. These are objects of her contemporary consumer culture, and none of them are objects typically associated with femininity. This woman lays claim to the solitude, the trappings, the pleasure, the vice, and the intellect of her modern world as her own. Indeed, the urbanity and modernity of both of these scenes is striking, in contrast to the more typical way of representing *lo mexicano* through the rural and cultural customs. Izquierdo instead portrays the thoroughly modern and the thoroughly Mexican through other pictorial means. The open window, a device which Izquierdo would often use to convey a sense of otherworldliness, lends a transcendent quality to the city that, presumably, bustles below. The women's bodies are heavy, monumental, and have noticeably large hands, much like the classicized, Picasso-esque nudes of her colleague Julio Castellanos. The Mexican modernity of these works come through not only in the objects and geographical location, but also through her pictorial style.

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[68] "Cronologia," in *María Izquierdo*, 298.

Women are the primary subjects of Izquierdo's paintings; she painted relatively few men apart from portraits. Over the course of the 1930s, Izquierdo painted a series of over forty watercolors and gouache paintings of nude women in barren or dislocated settings. Each evokes multiple layers of mood, moving between shades of the cosmic, mysticism, playfulness, unrest, and desperation. "Her watercolors reveal certain ritual content that refers to celestial views of the universe," writes Luis Martín Lozano, "a reordering of both her inner and outer universes." But Lozano is wary of overanalyzing these elusive paintings, as "the complexity of the subjects" renders it "difficult to unveil their possible meanings."[69]

In *Saturno* (*Saturn*), 1936 (fig. 1.19) five naked women kneel on the ground, their wrists tied up and bound up to a thick ring of Saturn. Cosmos and earth are impossibly compressed, and a dense cloud conjoins each strata, heightening the sense of suffocation. *Saturno* represents oppression and bondage, and while the title of Izquierdo's 1937 *Alegoría a la libertad* (*Allegory of Liberty*) (fig. 1.20) suggests a representation of an opposite state, the painting in fact demonstrates the complexities and irony inherent in freedom. A winged figure soars through a blue sky streaked with orange lightening bolts; she holds a lighted torch in her left hand and, in her right, she grasps the long dark hair of a bundle of decapitated heads. In her wake, a cloud of dark soot billows from a shaft. Sensations of peace and hope are expressed through the traditional codes of the angel, flight, the crescent moon, and a torch held high; at the same time, violence is explicit in the decapitated heads and reinforced by the agitated sky. Overall, the scene suggests that freedom inevitably comes at a very high cost.

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[69] Lozano, "Regarding Modern Mexican Painting: María Izquierdo (1902-1955)," 38.

As Lozano maintains, ascertaining absolute, detailed meaning in any one of Izquierdo's watercolors is difficult, but the collective significance of this body of work is more legible. Adriana Zavala asserts that whatever is to be made of the dislocated, primordial world that Izquierdo created, "her pictorial focus is on the generalized oppression of women," and her interpretation of the female body in this world "suggests that she was acutely aware of, and in disagreement with, the image of woman advanced elsewhere."[70] In total, Izquierdo's series of watercolors stand as an intentional strategy to transform the representation of women in modern Mexican art, and demonstrate Izquierdo's broad concerns about women's psychological and physical well being.

1940: THE TIDAL SHIFT

Many changes occur in Izquierdo's oeuvre right around the year 1940. Elizabeth Ferrer aptly summarizes these changes in her "brightened palette" and evidence her "heightened affection for things Mexican,"[71] from Izquierdo's circus scenes, punctuated by vibrant magenta, golden ochre and cool blue tones, to her *alacenas* (cabinets), which abound with local goods. María Izquierdo's series of domestic altars and evocations of the Virgin Mary in the 1940s – representing a considerable portion of her work in that decade and the focus of this dissertation – in one sense can be viewed as consistent with a post-Revolutionary endeavor to capture *lo mexicano*, that which is uniquely and typically Mexican, but other significant factors also shape this development in her work. The decades of the 1920s and 1930s constitute the post-Revolutionary era in Mexican history, while the 1940s stand apart as ushering in a more conservative political agenda, economic stability, and a shifting social climate. Likewise, Izquierdo's career and oeuvre took a distinct turn between the 1930s and 1940s. Many threads through Izquierdo's work of the 1930s weave into her output of the 1940s, but her work in this decade cannot always be read in the same critical and contextual terms that were set in the previous decade. Her decisions about her work and her career after 1940 are more richly understood alongside an examination of the shifting historical context.

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[70] Zavala, "The Big Three: María Izquierdo," 77.

[71] Elizabeth Ferrer, "A Singular Path: The Artistic Development of María Izquierdo," 18.

Religion Post-1940

Anticlericalism, a distinct thread through post-Revolutionary politics, reached a crescendo under President Lazaro Cárdenas (1934-1940). But his radical views gave way to a new conservative administration under his successor, Manuel Ávila Camacho, and, in many respects, to a new Mexico. In his inaugural address, Ávila Camacho declared, "Soy creyente," which loosely translates, "I am a Catholic."[72] It is a brief but significant statement, as it is preceded by numerous anticlerical administrations, culminating in the fervent de-Christianization campaigns of Cárdenas. Its inclusion in his inaugural address announced to Mexicans that the extreme anticlericalism that defined the previous administration was effectively over. Restraints on the Church were lifted under Ávila Camacho, and the religious conflict that wracked the nation for so long was diffused. The shift was visible in the popular culture. For example, the last film produced in Mexico in the year 1940 bore the title Creo en Dios, "I Believe in God."[73]

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[72] Manuel Ávila Camacho quoted in Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein and Eric Zolov, "Assembling the Fragments: Writing a Cultural History of Mexico Since 1940," in *Fragments of a Golden Age,* 3.

Around 1940, Izquierdo began to incorporate more religious iconography into her work. She shifted from ambiguous scenes alluding to the mystical and to a sense of the heavens over to more concrete Mexican Catholic material and explicit scenes of devotional rites. Many of her most memorable paintings of this decade draw from her series of works of *ofrendas* or *altares*, domestic home altars intended as offerings of prayer, and her Virgin Mary and Madonna and Child images. These works present tangible and widely recognizable religious iconography, rather than the scenes of universalist, cosmic mystery that her engagement with Los Contemporáneos in the 1930s had inspired. She brought to her work of the 1940s a view onto popular religious practice, the likes of which had not been seen in Izquierdo's work since the funeral scenes of 1933-34. The absence of this imagery in the Cárdenas era, to arise simultaneously with the administration of Ávila Camacho and a politically relaxed religious climate, is a conspicuous development in Izquierdo's imagery, otherwise considered generally apolitical.[74]

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[73] Carl J. Mora, *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society, 1896-1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 52.

[74] I do not mean to imply that Izquierdo's images are a direct political commentary, but the shift in tone and subject that her work takes in this era is worthy of note. Jean Meyer, reflecting on the Revolutionary period of conflict and the rapid modernization to follow: "Ironically, as Mexico became more nationalist, it may also have become more Catholic. Today no one challenges the idea that Catholicism is still an essential element of national

Mexicanidad Post-1940

Though the political climate was already beginning to change towards the end of Cárdenas's term, "1940 still remains a convenient historical signpost of the shift in revolutionary politics away from Cárdenas' radical redistribution of wealth toward Ávila Camacho's policy of intensive capital accumulation." [75] The economic depression that beset the 1930s began to lift. The onset of World War II and global fiscal dislocations further worked to the benefit of Mexico's economy, and steady economic growth and a powerful process of modernization ensued for nearly two decades.[76] This economic boon encouraged social mobility, and the values and attitudes of an increasingly urbanized and industrialized society co-mingled with prevailing traditional institutions and ideals.[77]

President Ávila Camacho made it a priority to renew the cultural project of *mexicanidad*, re-emphasizing national unity and identity in a moment when the state of the nation was, once again, in flux.[78] The programmatic aims stemming from the 1910 Revolution and which shaped political ideology for over two decades were essentially

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identity. Even Mexicans who claim not to be Catholic will often assert that they are "Guadalupanos." Jean Meyer, "An Idea of Mexico: Catholics in the Revolution," 295.

[75] Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein and Eric Zolov, "Assembling the Fragments: Writing a Cultural History of Mexico Since 1940," in *Fragments of a Golden Age,* 8.

[76] "1940 is often hailed as the onset of the country's prolonged "miracle" of economic growth, which continued through the 1960s." Ibid.

[77] Loaeza, 138.

[78] Michael Nelson Miller, *Red, White, and Green: The Maturing of Mexicanidad, 1940-1946* (Southwestern Studies No. 107. El Paso: Texas Western Press, University of Texas, 1998).

over.[79] While the language of *mexicanidad* was by this time firmly in place as a national discourse, the new era mandated new voices for that existing vocabulary. The nature of *mexicanidad* after 1940 looked both to the past and to the future, continuing to celebrate Mexico's unique traditions and roots, while adapting the forms to modern markets and means of dissemination, such as cinema.

Michael Nelson Miller examines this 1940s revival of *mexicanidad*, coined *avilacamachismo*, as a way to redefine and restructure the relationship between culture and state in Mexico in the 1940s. *Avilacamachismo* sought to develop both popular and high culture as a means of supporting national unity. Ávila Camacho developed a mass media-based cultural nationalism via the plastic arts, dance, radio and cinema. Nationalist sentiment was relayed to the masses via dynamic and diverse Mexican personalities who themselves embodied the experience of history through their creative output. Some of these personalities worked directly for the state, others were supported with salaries, commissions, and teaching jobs; all in one way or another "served the state as 'stars' of the emergent national culture."[80]

State sponsorship of the arts furnished Izquierdo with a range of new opportunities, propelling her from the avant-garde margins to the national stage. Izquierdo's shift in the subjects of her work to tangible "things Mexican" around 1940 complimented the new thrust of *mexicanidad*, and helped lead her to an active, public role in the cultural regime. By the year 1945, Izquierdo was regularly featured in the daily papers and popular magazines, published art criticism, taught painting at the Ministry of Public Education's School of Painting and Sculpture, and was appointed a cultural ambassador to South America.

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[79] Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein and Eric Zolov, "Assembling the Fragments: Writing a Cultural History of Mexico Since 1940," in *Fragments of a Golden Age,* 3-22.

[80] Miller, 1-3.

As President Ávila Camacho drew Mexico and its rising middle class into material comfort and a more industrialized, modernized mode, the rural and the traditional continued to codify that which was truly Mexican. While, as Zavala argues, there was "nothing explicitly Mexican" in the dislocated, primordial landscapes of the 1930s,[81] Izquierdo left her viewers with no doubts of national affiliation in the decade to follow. Less preoccupied with the ideals of Los Contemporáneos in striking the fine balance between both the universal and the Mexican, and between the local and the cosmopolitan, the subjects of Izquierdo's paintings intensified in focus on an essentialized experience of Mexican history. In a 1943 interview for *El Universal Gráfico*, she asserted that while some of her contemporaries were influenced by European sources, her "painting is absolutely Mexican, without any mixing."[82] With such statements, she distinguished herself from the Contemporáneos philosophy that fostered her early career and transferred her alliance to *avilacamachismo*. Izquierdo's painting followed suit. *Altares*, *alacenas*, and other still lifes of the 1940s drew on a strong legacy of colonial painting and honored the significance of popular Mexican goods. Her nudes in urban quarters in the 1930s were exchanged for images of Virgins embedded in domestic shrines in the 1940s.

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[81] Zavala, "The Big Three: María Izquierdo," 76.

[82] "Mi pintura es absolutamente mexicana, sin ningún mezcla." Consuelo Colon R., "Actividades de la Mujer Mexicana: María Izquierdo," interview with María Izquierdo in *El Universal Gráfico,* 24 September 1943, 12, 15.

In 1940, Izquierdo made a distinct shift from the high volume of watercolors on paper to oils on canvas, demonstrating her ever-growing confidence and ambitions as an artist of Mexico's highest calibur. Following the successes of exhibitions such as the 1930 solo show at the Art Center in New York City and the 1937 exhibition of thirty small watercolors organized by Antonin Artaud in Paris, she began to participate in even more high profile national and international exhibitions.[83] *Mis sobrinas* (*My Nieces*) (fig. 1.21) was included in the "Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art" show at New York's Museum of Modern Art; it was the first artwork purchased by the Mexican government for the proposed Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico.[84] Her artwork again appeared in the "Mexican Art Today" exhibit in Philadelphia in 1943, and in the same year Izquierdo was given a solo show at the Palacio de Bellas Artes. This exposure helped boost Izquierdo's sales abroad, and in the new economic climate, sales of her paintings rose in Mexico as well. In an interview conducted at the time of the Palacio de Bellas Artes exhibition, she proudly boasted to press, "I have noticed, with true satisfaction, at least half of the forty paintings that I painted this year have been sold in Mexico, and I think others have sold in the current exhibition."[85] In the late 1930s and 1940s, as the socialist aims of the

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[83] Following his stay in Mexico City in 1936, Surrealist writer Antonin Artaud brought back to Paris about thirty of Izquierdo's small watercolor paintings and organized an exhibition of her work at the Galerie Van den Berg in Montparnasse at the beginning of 1937. The current whereabouts of most of these watercolors are unknown, but Terri Geis indicates that *Consolación* (fig. 1.4) was included in the exhibition. See Terri Geis, "The voyaging reality: María Izquierdo and Antonin Artaud, Mexico and Paris," in *Papers of Surrealism* 4 (Winter 2005), 1.

[84] The museum ultimately would not open until the 1960s. Today, *Mis sobrinas* is in the collection of the Museo Nacional de Arte in Mexico City.

[85] María Izquierdo stated in an interview: "Casi todo mi obra la de los demás pintores, en vista de que aquí no tenemos mercado ni museo de arte moderno, se ha ido a los Estados

Revolution waned and the economic structure of the country changed, artists like Izquierdo and Rufino Tamayo became popular. The bourgeoisie, according to Robin Greeley, turned to paintings such as theirs "in its search for an art that was 'nationalist' while carrying no overt social messages, and which called for an 'educated' sensibility and nuanced readings inappropriate to the earlier years of the revolution."[86]

Gender Issues Post-1940

Although the women's movement in Mexico continued to develop, conservative mores and systematic political marginalization still endured through the 1940s. A bill put forth by President Lázaro Cárdenas in 1937 granting women suffrage was vetoed due to the overwhelming distrust and fear of the influence that the Catholic Church held over Mexican women; women did not receive the right to vote until 1953. The Revolution and its rhetoric of inclusion did not yield a radical advance in women's rights and opportunities. Motherhood was still regarded as a woman's ultimate fulfillment, and the tropes reinforced by the new wave of *mexicanidad* in the 1940s fortified the conventional type of the maternal woman even further.

Izquierdo's evocations of the holiest mother, the Virgin Mary – explicit in *retablo* imagery and Madonna and Child compositions, and suggested in several self-portraits and portraits of rural women – echo this persistent view of women's primary role as

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Unidos; pero últimamente he notado, con verdadera satisfacción que por lo menos la mitad de los 40 cuadros que pinté este año, han sido vendidos en México, y en la actual exhibición creo que habrán de venderse otros." Colon R., 12, 15.

[86] Robin Adèle Greeley. "Painting Mexican Identities: Nationalism and Gender in the Work of María Izquierdo," *Oxford Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2000): 65.

mothers. Whereas the women in her watercolors of the 1930s are incorporated into a world of nebulous symbols, her most striking images of women in the 1940s conflate the average Mexican woman with her most revered and easily recognized icon, and vice versa. This is not to say that Izquierdo's attention to motherhood in her subjects precluded her concern for women and their rights. Though her images of Virgins and mothers seem ambivalent toward the position of women in Mexican society, Izquierdo's multiple public statements about women are quite clear. In the 1930s, a newcomer to the avant-garde and the field of art, Izquierdo got wise to the professional challenges of women in Mexico; in the 1940s, she exploited a platform in the mainstream media to speak out about them.

In her July 1939 radio address "La mujer y el arte mexicano" ("The Woman and Mexican Art"), Izquierdo discussed at length her perspective on the disregard of women artists and their exclusion from Mexico's cultural history. Izquierdo argued that women, for centuries, had been "completely displaced from artistic and intellectual endeavors … not permitted to do any other thing that was not cooking, embroidering, and caring for her husband." The only reason that there had been no great women artists in Mexico, or in the world, for that matter, was because "only now has the woman been given the opportunity to develop her talent… But I believe that if a woman continues to conquer and has more liberty of expression, she will arrive at a high position in the visual arts."[87]

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[87] "Todos sabemos que solo en nuestra siglo a la mujer se le empieza a dar oportunidad para que estudie y trabaje en lo que le guste, antes a la mujer no se le permitía hacer otra cosa que no fuera, cocinar, bordar y atender a su esposo… solamente ahora se le empieza a dar oportunidad a la mujer para que desarrolle su talento… Pero creo, que si la mujer sigue conquistando mas y mas libertad de expresión llegará tan alto en las artes plásticas." Radio broadcast conference dictated by María Izquierdo, "La mujer y el arte mexicano," July 1939. A copy of the transcription is located the artist's file at the

That high position, in fact, was exactly the direction on which Izquierdo had set her sights.

Still, Izquierdo's public involvement in the women's movement was measured, and her apparently conflicting points of view have confused scholars about the nature and degree of her feminism, and whether to label it as such.[88] Izquierdo was a proud pioneer in her field and refused to live within the bounds of conservative social mores. And so, at a time in which women's rights hung in the balance, it can seem puzzling that Izquierdo would openly express doubts about feminism. Indeed, she sharply criticized feminists, saying, "they think that bragging out loud makes them better [than men]; but deep inside they are still full of old prejudices and are just covering up with theatrical attitudes for their inferiority complex. I think feminists have not conquered anything for humanity nor for themselves, and instead of helping women grow (who for so many years have been slaves to everything) they get in the way of emancipation."[89] Elizabeth Ferrer reconciled Izquierdo's complex notions about women by acknowledging that "she promoted the

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Biblioteca de las Artes, El Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información de Artes Plásticas (CENIDIAP) of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA), Mexico City. Quoted in Spanish and English in González, 8.

[88] Luis-Martín Lozano, for example, questions the validity of analyzing Izquierdo from a feminist perspective, due in part to Izquierdo's own resistance to be labeled as a "feminist" and associated with notions she and others deemed too radical and irrational. Lozano, "Regarding Modern Mexican Painting: María Izquierdo (1902-1955)," 45-46.

[89] "… gritan en tono fanfarrón y epatante [sic], con eso creen que los superan [a los hombres]; pero en el fondo siguen amarradas a viejos prejuicios y encubren sus complejos de inferioridad con actitudes teatrales. Creo que las feministas no han conquistado nada para la humanidad ni para ellas, y que en vez de ayudar al engrandecimiento de la mujer (por tantos años esclava de todo) entorpecen su emancipación." Radio broadcast conference dictated by María Izquierdo, "La mujer y el arte mexicano," July 1939. Quoted in Spanish and English in Lozano, "Regarding Modern Mexican Painting: María Izquierdo (1902-1955)," 46-47.

right of women to social emancipation and to follow such unconventional paths as art; nevertheless, her feminism was tempered by her conservative upbringing."[90] And though Luis-Martín Lozano observes that Izquierdo lashed out against "anything that might hinder the development of women," even feminists, he ventures that her social views might have influenced her artwork marginally: only along selected lines does he concede that "the artwork of María Izquierdo could be said to have certain feminist readings."[91] Neither considers that her multivalent views on women are intentional and strategic.

A more plausible explanation for her tempered attitude is that in such statements Izquierdo is internalizing an inevitable backlash, the kind demonstrated by countless women artists throughout the twentieth century, for fear of being associated with a group popularly labeled as man-haters. She had no incentive to identify with a faction that was considered to isolate from and prove themselves better than men; it could not possibly work in her favor professionally. "Emancipation," she knew by this point, meant collaborating with the boys in power, not alienating them further. Strategically, it was in Izquierdo's best interests, as a woman who was actively trying to move ahead and position herself in the field, that she not further estrange her male contemporaries, who were already skeptical of her merits, but rather infiltrate them. Izquierdo's public statements as well as her painterly subjects strategically navigated a social terrain in a way that would advance her own progressive principles while making them palatable enough to the ears of social convention, insuring that her ideas would be heard and viewed.

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[90] Ferrer, 14.

[91] Lozano, "Regarding Modern Mexican Painting: María Izquierdo (1902-1955)," 47.

CONCLUSION

A preponderance of images of women, elements of religious mysticism, and an unwavering commitment to *mexicanidad* define María Izquierdo's entire oeuvre. Therefore, it is tempting to interpret Izquierdo's work of the 1940s in the same analytical terms as the 1930s post-Revolutionary era. But Mexico's economy, politics, and society underwent enormous changes after the year 1940, and an examination of this historical shift sheds light on changes in Izquierdo's work and Izquierdo herself between the two decades.

From the 1930s to the 1940s, Izquierdo moved from a body of multivalent symbols to more nationalistic, widely legible signs. As subsequent chapters will demonstrate, she subtly changed the shape and meaning of those standardized signs to speak to her ever-developing ideas of womanhood, religiosity, and Mexican-ness. A business-minded professional, true to both her commercial and personal impulses, Izquierdo tapped into new opportunities and effective ways to communicate her progressive ideas about women to a broad audience and to advance her own professional agenda.

CHAPTER TWO

Icons Behind Altars: Devotional Imagery and the Mexican Catholic Woman

In the 1940s, popular and traditional Catholic artifacts and iconography became a prominent feature in the work of María Izquierdo. During this time, she produced a broad body of work including still life paintings of Day of the Dead decorations and handicrafts, portraits of the Madonna and Child, and representations of Adam and Eve. Particularly distinctive in the artist's oeuvre is her series of paintings of *ofrendas*, traditional home altars or offerings commonly associated with mourning and with the Easter season, Saints' Days, and Day of the Dead celebrations. Izquierdo produced at least eleven variations of home altar paintings between 1943 and 1948. It is unclear how many more altars she might have executed; a newspaper article feature from 1943 pictures an *Altar de Dolores* (fig. 2.1) not published in any current literature, and its whereabouts are unknown.[1]

Born of a longstanding colonial tradition, contemporary practice, and personal significance, Izquierdo's altar paintings exemplify the iconography and sentiments of *mexicanidad* fundamental to her work. The meanings and cultural implications of this iconography, however, have yet to be adequately analyzed. Most scholarship to date rightly identifies, but fails to move beyond, an understanding of Izquierdo's religious imagery as emblematic of post-Revolutionary *mexicanidad* focused on popular tradition. Examining the home altars in the respective contexts of the broader society and culture, contemporary art, and Izquierdo's own oeuvre, I argue that the iconography and formal characteristics of these works have a deeper resonance with the complex position of the woman in Mexican society.

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[1] A photograph of this work accompanies a feature article by Mada Ontañon, "Los Pintores en su studio: María Izquierdo y sus animalitos," *Todo*, 2 September 1943, 29-30.

Through her work of the 1940s and her series of home altars in particular, Izquierdo broadens the scope of the post-Revolutionary Mexicanist visual arts project, predominantly defined by the male imagination, and paves the way for a more gynocentric view of Mexican cultural production and consumption. At the same time, the altar iconography casts attention on Catholic institutional representations of the Virgin Mary and calls into question the subsequent effect on the Mexican imagination of the roles and fate of women. Together, the *ofrendas* elucidate the push and pull between the potential of modern Mexican feminine empowerment and the persistent constraints of traditional gender expectations.[2]

THE HOME ALTAR TRADITION

Home altars are individualized expressions of the social and spiritual concerns of the family, functioning as mediators between the earthly and the divine. As an aid in private forms of worship, the home altar has always allowed for great creativity and religious freedom. In the hands of the individual, the contents of these private – and during certain periods of Mexico's history, covert – shrines reflect a hybrid of European and indigenous beliefs and rituals. Everyday objects are imbued with special significance as part of the altar, with new meanings created in the context of the shrine.

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[2] See my article dealing with Izquierdo's home altars in: Celeste Donovan, "Icons Behind Altars: María Izquierdo's Devotional Imagery and the Modern Mexican Catholic Woman." *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 26 (2010).

Traditionally, Catholics honor sacred figures on each Friday of the Lenten season. The *Viernes de Dolores*, Friday of Our Lady of Sorrows, marks the fifth Friday of Lent and honors the Virgin Mary's life of martyrdom, compassion, and pain. This feast day is a prelude to *Semana Santa*, the Holy Week leading to Easter Sunday. Altars are erected in the streets, homes, and churches throughout Mexico and commemorate the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary;[3] most specifically, the altars honor the mother of Christ in her desolation at the foot of the cross of her crucified son.

Izquierdo's *Viernes de Dolores* (*Friday of Our Lady of Sorrows*) (1944-45) (fig. 2.2) testifies to this centuries-old tradition; like her other paintings in this series, it faithfully captures the customary contents of Mexican Catholic altars. She erects the altar on ascending tiers, and lines the shelves with *papel picado*, a traditional Mexican craft of hand-cut, brightly colored paper. Altars are full of aromas, colors, and flavors, comprising an animated expression of faith and materializing the experience of the *Mater*

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[3] The Feast of Our Lady of Sorrows was first celebrated in 1244 as a devotion and meditation of the seven founders of the Servite Order, to help focus attention on the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin Mary. The times of deep pain in the Virgin's life were: the prophecy of Simeon at the temple; the flight into Egypt; the loss of the Child Jesus in the Temple; the meeting of Jesus and his mother on the Way of the Cross; the Crucifixion; the taking down of the body of Jesus from the cross; the burial of Jesus.

Dolorosa.[4] The items in the altar, individually and collectively, double as beautiful decoration and an earnest representation of the pain and suffering that the *Dolorosa* saw, felt, and consumed; the altar is pain materialized. Wheatgrass is cultivated in small receptacles, manifesting growth, life, and time; it symbolizes rebirth and resurrection. Bitter oranges and fruits, generally associated with fecundity in the art historical still life tradition, in this context symbolize the Virgin's sufferings. Extinguished candles may be remnants of a public festival vigil.

Izquierdo artfully and purposefully arranged objects in her home altar paintings around a central image of the Virgin Mary, in a small *retablo* painting set inside of the altar.[5] The face of the Virgin in *Viernes de Dolores* expresses profound grief, and tears shimmer on her cheeks. The figure is draped in customary mourning veils of red and blue. Izquierdo isolated another traditional apparition of the *Mater Dolorosa* in *Altar de Dolores* (*Altar of Our Lady of Sorrows*) of 1943 (fig. 2.3), which depicts Mary with her hands clasped in an attitude of prayer and her gaze cast upward.[6] Angel figurines pray to the saint's image, their posture mimicking that of the devotee to the altar. Wheatgrass, fruits, *papel picado*, and extinguished candles grace this altar as well. Also present is a glass of *agua fresca* – its reddish coloring symbolizes blood – which is offered to visitors to the altar.

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[4] *Mater Dolorosa* is Latin for the Sorrowful Mother or the Mother of Sorrows. At times, the term is shortened to *Dolorosa*. *Stabat Mater* is a related term, abbreviated from "*Stabat Mater Dolorosa*" ("Here stood the sorrowful Mother"), the first line of a thirteenth century hymn, referring to the Virgin Mary's stance at the foot of Jesus Christ's crucifix.

[5] The word *retablo*, or retable, derives from the Latin, *retro tabulum*, meaning "behind the table or altar." The devotional *retablo* image is alternatively known as *lámina* (sheet), *imagen pintada* (painted image), or *santo* (saint). María J. Rodríguez-Shadow, "Women's Prayers: The Aesthetics and Meaning of Female Votive Paintings in Chalma," in *Crafting Gender, Women and Folk Art in Latin America and the Caribbean*, ed. Eli Bartra (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 171.

[6] Other canonical advocations of the suffering *Dolorosa* include Mary with one sword or with seven swords piercing her heart.

Altars commemorating Our Lady of Sorrows were introduced in Jalisco – Izquierdo's home province, incidentally – by the Franciscans in the sixteenth century. Originally intended for the churches, the altars quickly gained popularity and were also erected in private residences.[7] The home altar became a space around which the faithful could gather to pray for divine intervention, miracles and blessings in times of distress. Icons of the venerated placed in the altar worked as powerful mediators between the members of the household and the divine.[8]

Home altars grew in importance as the secularization of public life advanced during the nineteenth century. The years of religious turmoil, marked especially by the civil war over the separation of church and state (1858-61), resulted in the sharp decline of priests and churches in Mexico. Much of rural Mexico received visits by priests as seldom as once a year, and religion was left more and more in the hands of the laity. New legislation ordered the removal of Catholic niches and shrines from the public eye, reinforcing the privatization of religious practice and devotion. Family-based religious practice centered around the home altar became the norm.[9]

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[7] Ramón Mata Torres, *Los tradicionales Altares de Dolores en Guadalajara* (Guadalajara, Mexico: Ayuntamiento de Guadalajara and Kauyumari, 1996), 7.

[8] Elizabeth N. C. Zarur, "Introduction," in *Art and Faith in Mexico: The Nineteenth Century Retablo Tradition*, eds. Elizabeth N.C. Zarur and Charles Muir Lovell (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 18.

The home altar was adapted to numerous Catholic feast days, and in many homes throughout Mexico, the altars remain a constant – yet ever-evolving – fixture in the home. As an aid in private forms of worship, the home altar has always allowed for great creativity and religious freedom in the hands of its maker. In the age of the Conquest, the Christian Europeans sought to eradicate indigenous religious practices, but the native population privately preserved their icons and practices, making covert offerings to their idols.[10] Syncretic Christianity developed in Mexico, blending Christian theology and pre-Columbian animist beliefs.

Izquierdo painted at least two such home altars dedicated to Day of the Dead celebrations, not to mention several still life paintings that include traditional Day of the Dead paraphernalia. The 1943 *Altar de muertos* (*Altar of the Dead*) (fig. 2.4) borrows many items from the Lenten altars of the same time period, including its two-tiered stage, curtains and linings of *papel picado*, vases of cut flowers and familiar candlesticks with extinguished candles. Bold paper flowers fill the back of the altar, and food offerings for the deceased are presented in the front: *pan de muerto* sweet bread, yam, squash and turnip. Popular figurines are dispersed through the middle level, including a small horse, a praying figure, and two *calavera* toys. Physically manifesting multiple elements of

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[9] Ibid. Also, see William H. Beezley, "Home Altars: Private Reflections in Public Life," in Dana Salvo, *Home Altars of Mexico* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1997), 96-97.

[10] Ramón A. Gutiérrez, "Conjuring the Holy: Mexican Domestic Altars," in Salvo, *Home Altars of Mexico*, 44-45.

Mexican faith, the animal, the Catholic and indigenous spirits commingle peacefully and naturally. At the altar's center – a location in which, in other altar paintings, the image of the Virgin resides – sits a replica of a skull made of sugar, a popular Day of the Dead item. With "María" imprinted across its forehead, the identity of the skull at once alludes to Izquierdo, the altar's mortal maker, and to the *Dolorosa* that the skull replaced.[11]

Izquierdo's distinct attention directed towards things Mexican in her home altars and a wide range of other paintings evidence her interest in examining multiple facets of Mexican identities. In this way, her work recalls the still life paintings of colonial and nineteenth-century Mexican art that present a socio-historical record of Mexican material culture.[12] Painters in New Spain and in the newly independent nation of Mexico recognized the capacity for native foods and locally produced wares to speak to a distinct and common identity. Art historian Edward Sullivan investigates the extent to which artists across the Americas, from colonial times to the modern era, continued to locate expressions of identity in everyday objects.[13] For modern painters like Izquierdo and Frida Kahlo, the *alacena* and still life genres represented the legacy of a national pictorial lexicon, one that offered the possibility of examining religious, national, and personal identities through the objects of everyday existence.[14]

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[11] A second *Altar del día de muertos (Altar of the Day of the Dead)* was reproduced in a Chilean newspaper, *Estampa*, in 1944, concurrent with Izquierdo's mission to the country as a cultural ambassador. Reproduced in *María Izquierdo* (México, D.F.: Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, A.C., 1988), 336.

[12] See Luis-Martin Lozano, "Regarding Modern Mexican Painting: María Izquierdo (1902-1955)," in *María Izquierdo, 1902-1955* (Chicago: Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, 1996), 52; and Edward Sullivan, "Questions of Definition: Origins and Meanings of Still Life in Latin America," in *Latin American Still Life: Reflections of Time and Place* (New York: Katonah Museum of Art, 1999), 9.

[13] Edward Sullivan's most recent book, *The Language of Objects in the Art of the Americas* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), deals with the topic of still life across Latin America in great breadth and depth.

Izquierdo's work, in part, is indebted to the legacy of Hermenegildo Bustos (1832-1907). A self-taught, Indian painter from Guanajuato, Bustos generated a body of work that encompassed portraiture, religious images, and still life, painted for churches and homes of his native province.[15] His 1874 painting *Bodegón con frutas (con alacrán y rana)* (*Still Life with Fruit (with Scorpion and Frog)*) (fig. 2.5), is a well-ordered, highly descriptive display of a variety of local produce; sliced and split open, the inner flesh of these ripe goods are exposed.[16] Local goods had served as a subject for Mexican still life in the colonial era as well. Antonio Pérez de Aguilar's (active 1749-1769) *Alacena* (*The Painter's Cupboard*) of 1769 (fig. 2.6), a *trompe l'oeil* kitchen cabinet packed with containers for foodstuffs, pewter and painted pottery, and other everyday odds and ends, might be interpreted as a metaphor for human sustenance of the mind and body. Magali M. Carrera points out a parallel between Aguilar's *Alacena* and *casta* painting of the same century, identifying an hierarchy to the organization of the objects in the three registers: at the top sit goods associated with the elite class, while the lower registers contain items that refer to a more plebeian, daily existence.[17] What at first seems little more than a view into the artist's personal cupboard becomes a portrait of social class and local culture.

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[14] Sullivan, *Latin American Still Life,* 9.

[15] *Retratos: 2,000 Years of Latin American Portraits* (San Antonio, TX: San Antonio Museum of Art, 2005), 193.

[16] After 1920, with the end of the Revolution, a deep interest in excavating Mexico's cultural roots took hold. The work of Hermenegildo Bustos began to come to light in the 1930s, as noted by Octavio Paz, "Bustos: I, a Painter, an Indian from This Village…," in *Essays on Mexican Art*, trans. Helen Lane (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993), 96. Walter Pach was the first foreign art historian to publish on Bustos. "Descubrimiento de un pintor Americano," was published in *Cuadernos Americanos* in November-December 1942. The article was subsequently published in the United States as "A Newly Found American Painter: Hermenegildo Bustos" in *Art in America* in January 1943.

One of Izquierdo's earliest experiments with the cabinet composition comes in her *Alacena* (*Cupboard*) of 1942 (fig. 2.7), in which the colonial quotidian model is re-appropriated for the modern era's privileging of popular artifacts. The painting features four shallow shelves of toys and figurines, many of which will reappear in various altar and cabinet paintings for years to come. The stratification of Aguilar's painting does not seem to figure here, but the variety of animals and characters in regional costumes radiate around a relative center: a figurine of Adam and Eve with the Serpent at the Tree of Knowledge. It is well known that Izquierdo painted objects that she herself owned, but her *Alacena* also points to multiple Mexican social identities via markers of folk craft, regionalism, religion, and domesticity. In a later cabinet painting, *Alacena con dulces cubiertos* (*Cupboard with Covered Sweets*), 1946 (fig. 2.8), the picture frame is again consumed by shallow shelves stocked with household goods. Consistent with other *trompe l'oeil* paintings, the width of the wooden shelves meets the edge of the frame, and the niche's interior walls and shelf platforms are depicted in a sharp perspective that is relative to the gaze of the viewer. The resulting effect is as though the cabinet penetrates the wall on which the canvas is hung, a technical device that she would also employ in her home altar paintings. The artful arrangement of decorative containers and *puebla* pottery, local fruits, *papel picado,* and figurines of horses and Day of the Dead toys is both modern and timeless, as easily interpreted as a contemporary household niche as one that is generations old. From yesteryear to the present, the *alacena* is unmistakably Mexican.

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[17] Magali M. Carrera, *Imagining Identity in New Spain: Race, Lineage, and the Colonial Body in Portraiture and Casta Paintings* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), xiii-xvi.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ALTAR MOTIF

Since early in her career, Izquierdo recognized the power of still life to convey multiple facets of Mexican-ness. Her modern experiments in the juxtaposition of objects shared with Rufino Tamayo in the early 1930s were a precursor to still-life tableau that emerged in her work around the year 1940. In turn, these still-lifes informed the domestic niche altars that she began to paint in 1943.

Trigo crecido (*Growing Wheat*) of 1940 (fig. 2.9) is a still-life painting that alludes to the domestic, sensual, and spiritual qualities of things Mexican. An image of the painting was reproduced in an article on María Izquierdo in *Excelsior* in 1952, and the photograph's caption titled the work "Ofrenda del Día de los Muertos," an offering for the Day of the Dead.[18] Today, *Trigo crecido* is not often considered in conjunction with her home altar paintings, but this newspaper caption enforces the interpretation of this still-life tableau as a home altar. The painting bridges significant characteristics of her work of the 1930s and 1940s. The painting's title, *Trigo crecido*, refers to the receptacle of growing wheatgrass traditionally placed in Lenten altars, and precedes the wheatgrass that would later appear in her altar niche paintings. The mannequin's painted face recalls the images of clowns pictured in Izquierdo's circus paintings of the period, but here, situated on the altar, with perfectly drawn tears dropping from the eyes, the figure eerily presages the presence of the *Dolorosa*. A covering with symbols of the sacrament of Communion is carefully tacked to the table, and further lined with a sheet of *papel picado*. Izquierdo employs the drawn back curtain, a sheet of white fabric, which obscures as much of the religious devotional imagery as it is intended to reveal. The familiar altar ephemera (foods, flowers, and Eucharistic symbols) are irreverently mixed with mundane objects (various trinkets, a mask, and a mannequin head), and as such are reminiscent of her modernist explorations shared with Rufino Tamayo in the early 1930s, such as her 1931 painting *El teléfono* (*The Telephone*) (fig. 1.2). Indeed, Olivier Debroise describes the interior scenes developed by both artists as an "overwhelming" accumulation of objects like "props on a theater stage… in which objects assume the role of silent characters."[19]

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[18] The caption continues, "¡Es tan mexicana, y tan María Izquierdo!" ("It's so Mexican, and so María Izquierdo!"). "María Izquierdo, Víctima del Monopolio Muralista," *Excelsior*, 19 February 1952.

Since her formative years working with Tamayo, Izquierdo continued to explore her fascination with the enigmatic and revelatory qualities contained in everyday objects in paintings like *La raqueta (The Racquet)* of 1938 (fig. 2.10). Adriana Zavala identifies these objects – the racquet and balls, gloves, cigarettes, clothing brush, and other items –

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[19] Olivier Debroise, "The Shared Studio: María Izquierdo and Rufino Tamayo," in *The True Poetry: The Art of María Izquierdo* (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1997), 56. Debroise elaborates, "…without considering composition, the objects that invade the closed spaces of a number of the artists' works from 1936, including furniture, sculptures, musical instruments, broken columns, theatrical curtains, and winged allegories, demonstrate that even though each had or her own predilections and obsessions, it is impossible to distinguish who contributed this or that element." Ibid., 59.

as “diversions appropriate for a bourgeois damsel,” thereby creating an absent portrait of a middle-class woman.[20] These objects also evoke something more abstract. *La raqueta* makes an appeal to the senses – sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch – at the same time that it indicates the momentary absence of sensation. The cut-out eyes of a mask cannot see; piano keys and a trumpet sit unplayed and do not sound; unlit cigarettes only have the potential for scent and taste once ignited; empty fingers of a set of gloves feel nothing. No less, anticipation fills the air; all of these objects possess the possibility of sensual pleasures once put into human hands.

When *La raqueta* was exhibited in 1943, Izquierdo subtitled it *Sueño de una doncella (Dream of a Maiden)*, which Zavala views as evidence of Izquierdo’s interest in “expressing the inner working of the mind.”[21] This reading reinforces the possibility of the window, set in the wall beyond the table-top still life, as providing an outlet to another dimension of space or consciousness, a concept that was likewise suggested in Rufino Tamayo’s 1928 painting *Naturaleza muerta con pie (Still Life with Foot)* (fig. 1.1). Izquierdo tightly compresses the pictorial space of the room; table, floor, and wall all seem to share the same plane. She sharply exaggerates the linear perspective of the windowsill in such a way that suggests a marked distance between the world of concrete objects within the room and the unknown world beyond; it seems that the window must pierce an impossibly thick wall, tunneling through to its opening. Through the window, it is neither day nor night, and there are no visual clues of what may lie outdoors, which disrupts the viewer's sense of order and familiarity with the interior setting and imbues the painting with sense of otherworldliness.

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[20] Adriana Zavala, *Un Arte Nuevo: El Aporte de María Izquierdo/A New Art: The Contribution of María Izquierdo* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2008), 68. Izquierdo went on to create other still life tableau that offered a view into the private quarters of a middle class woman, such as *El alhajero* (*The Jewelry Box*) (1942) and *El velo de novia* (*The Bridal Veil*) (1943).

[21] Ibid.

From the tabletop tableau to the shallow walls of the cupboard, Izquierdo utilized still life and the objects contained within them to interrogate multiple issues of identity. *El gato sabio* (*Wise Cat*), 1943 (fig. 2.11) is an eclectic mix of local objects – natural, animal, and man-made. Reminiscent of the strange juxtapositions present in her still lifes of the 1930s, the seemingly random collection of objects merges into a woman's portrait. Behind the tableau, a vibrant traditional Mexican dress is limply propped on the skeleton of the chair, and its bold yellow and pink colors are picked up in the fruits displayed before it on the table. The ripe, open fruits are suggestive of female genitalia, fecundity, and woman's perceived connection to nature. A mannequin's disembodied head stares blankly from the right side of the composition. The Indian woman, steeped in tradition, meets the New Woman, as the indigenous dress inhabits the same space as the commercial mannequin of a contemporary, urban department store. A pipe, laid before the mannequin head, confers a masculine element to the picture, implying either the presence of a man or the socially subversive behavior of a woman, whose smoking would be viewed as un-ladylike, so to speak. Together, the tableau represents the modern Mexican woman, one who both honors the past and fully engages the present.

El gato sabio also invites a consideration of this modern Mexican woman's spiritual life. To the left of the composition, a white cat paws at an open book, turned to a page inscribed with symbols of the Passion; the adjacent page appears blank. The meaning, if there is one or many to be deciphered, is elusive. Luis-Martín Lozano presumes a subversive intent, imploring the viewer "to consider the hidden meaning of such a 'wise cat' that appears to be reading a chapter on blank pages of a book about sacrifice, love and death."[22] Yet he stops short of offering any definitive interpretation; either the cat is not so wise, or the quasi-biblical volume itself is impenetrable and incomprehensible. Elizabeth Ferrer hints at a less secular interpretation, stating that like other of Izquierdo's works of the 1940s, *El gato sabio*'s "enigmatic quality points to an attraction to metaphysical realms and to a perception of reality as imbued with a spiritual or otherworldly dimension."[23]

Like the home altar niches that would follow, *La raqueta, Trigo crecido,* and *El gato sabio* explore the connection between physical sensation and the ethereal – taste, touch, scent as a pathway to knowledge and a higher consciousness. Like the visitor to the *Altar de Dolores* (fig. 2.3) who drinks the red *agua fresca*, a symbol of blood, one comes to understand God through one's senses. Izquierdo's accumulations of things Mexican, things popular, things religious, and things gendered, evinces the notion that one can only come to understand the supernatural, the mind, dreams, and faith through the sensual experience of the material world. Izquierdo's series of home altars, along with the objects held within them, materially mediate human worldly understanding with divinity and faith. The ineffable takes shape in the objects to which meaning is prescribed.

The framed *retablo* image of the Virgin Mary, imbedded within Izquierdo's altar paintings, builds on the primacy of sensory knowledge established in the artist's work.

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[22] Lozano, *María Izquierdo, 1902-1955,* 53.

[23] Elizabeth Ferrer, *The True Poetry: The Art of María Izquierdo*, 20.

Retablo icons are intended to act as a material intermediary between the devotee and the saint. Situated as they are within Izquierdo's altar compositions, the framed image is a painting within a painting. In this pictorial meta-construction, Izquierdo's larger painting then mediates between the viewer and the altar's devotee, between the aesthetic experience and the devotional experience. At the same time, the painting within a painting device questions art's ability to represent reality at all.

The content of the frame in Izquierdo's altars also could be interpreted as a window into a spiritual realm. A 1952 painting by Izquierdo, *La Alacena (Viernes de Juguetería)* (fig. 2.12), asserts this possibility. The structural framework is typical of her cabinet *alacenas*, but the title of the work, *Viernes de Juguetería*, clearly is indebted to the *Viernes de Dolorosa* altars, a religious celebration in this case dedicated to a "toy store." The composition includes elements typically found in her altars, such as the drawn lace curtains, extinguished candles, toy figurines, and *papel picado*. The top shelf contains the items most closely associated with Lenten altars: oranges and wheatgrass, symbolizing suffering and rebirth, respectively. The frame in this top register does not hold an image of the *Dolorosa*, but rather cuts through the wall behind it and opens a window onto a deep blue horizon of water and sky, alluding to an otherworldly realm. Indeed, it is the same window that appeared in her 1938 painting *La raqueta* (fig. 2.10), which explored the notion of an outlet to another dimension of space or consciousness. Any grounding in reality is further obscured by the discontinuity of spatial relationships around the frame of the cabinet. Like her other altars, this painting explores the tensions and harmonies between the present and the past. This theme highlights the condition of the modern Mexican woman, who was challenged to negotiate the opportunities that modern life offered versus the societal pressures that discouraged women from pursuing them.

Elizabeth Ferrer believes that “in contrast to her paintings of the Virgin Mary or popular traditions, many of Izquierdo’s still lifes,” including *El gato sabio* and *Trigo crecido*, “are more personal, even intimate, explorations of her identity.”[24] Olivier Debroise also ascribes personal and emotional significance to the altars and *alacenas*: “Captured on canvas, the elements acquire worth of sentimental sign – their choice and representation obey subjective necessities, emotions, independent from their real characteristics – and end up creating a poetic space.”[25] Indeed, Izquierdo’s still life and altar niche paintings are more than formal, modern experiments in the juxtaposition of objects. Izquierdo’s paintings are thoughtfully coded accumulations of symbols, intended to express multiple issues of identity. Izquierdo’s private self is not the only identity at stake in these paintings; these paintings speak to a collective feminine Mexican identity.

THE WEEPING WOMAN

Izquierdo’s paintings of home altars, with imbedded Mater Dolorosa *retablos*, reside in the tension between persistent social expectations of women and the artist’s attempts to subvert those notions. Typically, women take charge of the preparation of home altars.[26] Even in extremely modest homes, the altar can be a dramatic, energetic, and sizeable focal point, both visually and emotionally. By creating altars, Mexican women propagate their national culture, generational traditions, and religious beliefs, as demonstrated by a photograph of *Four Generations of a Purépechan Family* (1988), taken by Dana Salvo (fig. 2.13). Izquierdo, in painting such altars, asserts the role of women – herself included – as producers of Mexican culture. More so than in traditional art historical still life or genre painting, Izquierdo's altar paintings privilege a distinctly feminized, private space. In so doing, Izquierdo interrogated the distinction between art and women's work. This was a significant inquiry posed by many women artists in the modern era, such as Russian and German women artists engaged in textile design in the 1920s and 1930s.[27]

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[24] Ibid., 19.

[25] “Plasmados en la tela, los elementos adquieren valor de signo sentimental – su elección y su representación obedecen a necesidades subjetivas, emocionales, independientes de sus características reales – y terminan creando un espacio poético.” Olivier Debroise, “El espíritu rojo no ha muerto (María Izquierdo),” in *Figuras en el Trópico, Plástica Mexicana 1920-1940* (Barcelona: Ediciones Océano, 1984), 154.

Highly personalized constructions within the domestic, women's sphere, Izquierdo's altars not only provide a vision of the Virgin Mary, but also evoke the woman – creator, devotee, and spiritual center of the family – before the altar. For example, in *Viernes de Dolores* (fig. 2.2), narrow shelves are crowded with mindfully chosen and arranged objects; fresh flowers and sliced fruits elicit a sense of closeness to she who tended to the space. The framed images of the *mestiza* Virgins in Izquierdo's altars even may be construed as mirror images, reflecting the very women, themselves striving to be Mary-like, who construct and pray before these home altars. Izquierdo renders the altar in such a tight, closed construction of space, that the viewer is suctioned into the small, shallow space of the cabinet, turning one's act of looking at the painting into a specific act of ritual experience.[28] The modernist formal strategies that she employs – specifically, the lack of pictorial relief and compression of depth – allow no visual escape for the viewer or, by extension, for the worshiper. The painting within a painting motif reinforces the tight, constrictive sense of space of the canvas. In turn, the layers of compression in these images parallels Izquierdo's descriptions of the circumscribed lives of traditional women "whose domain was the kitchen and whose territory was limited by the door of the home."[29]

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[26] Beezley, 96-97.

[27] For a summary of women artists associated with Bauhaus textile art and clothing and costume design, see Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1990), 236-260.

Izquierdo's altar compositions avert the sense of the viewer as an outsider-looking-in, as is the case in a painting like Alberto Garduño's *Pagando la manda (Paying the Offering)* of 1922 (fig. 2.14). Incidentally, Izquierdo took drawing classes with Garduño, also a native of Jalisco, at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes in 1927-1929. Garduño's painting captures rural Mexicans who have traveled to one of the many pilgrimage sites in the country, a location where a miracle once occurred. Many before them have visited the site, evidenced by the collection of *ex-voto* paintings, which have been offered up in thanks to a divine spirit. The peasant worshippers, viewed in profile and kneeling in prayer before an unseen altar or devotional statue, are the primary subjects of the painting; the backdrop to the scene is the wall containing the *ex-voto* paintings.[30] In Izquierdo's religious documents, by contrast, which solely present the devotional object, the physical experience of her painting is the event of worship itself; her home altars, then, conjure not only a Mexican Catholic craft but a Mexican Catholic experience. The viewer is not even one participant amongst many, but is the sole participant in this ritual experience.

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[28] Leonard Folgarait discusses one's movement through Diego Rivera's mural cycle at the National Palace as "an act of ritual experience." Leonard Folgarait, *Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico: Art of the New Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[29] "Muchas personas de estrecho criterio piensan mal de la mujer de nuestros días; creen que porque trabaja y se incorpora al ritmo de la ciudad es moralmente inferior a la mujer antigua cuya sede era la cocina y cuyo territorio estaba limitado por la puerta del hogar." María Izquierdo, "Carta a las mujeres de México," *Zócalo*, no. 2, 24 Oct 1950.

While Izquierdo's series of *ofrendas* honor domestic spaces and acknowledge the cultural contribution of Mexican women, the Virgin Mary *retablo* paintings stationed within them convey mixed and complex messages about the women who worship her image. The Virgin's image is a construction of an institutionalized patriarchal religion, but one that is continually appropriated and reinvented in private worship. As the Universal Mother, Mary is her devotee's greatest comfort, though she herself is a sufferer of intense sorrow. She is a woman with singular social visibility and reverence, but her significance is entirely dependent upon men, specifically, God the Father and Jesus the Son. In *Viernes de Dolores* (fig. 2.2), the image of the *Dolorosa*, forever in tears, is tightly circumscribed by the frame around the *retablo*, but her apparition is nestled in a hearth of domestic, feminine creativity. These conflicting meanings attend Izquierdo's appropriation of the icon, resulting in paintings that are multivalent.

In her altar paintings, Izquierdo artfully and purposefully arranged objects around a central image of the Virgin Mary. The quintessential model of suffering, the *Mater*

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[30] Though they are both closely related to private devotional experiences, *ex-votos* differ from *retablo* paintings. *Ex-votos* are anecdotal paintings painted by folk artisans or individual worshippers and are offered as "symbols of devotion and thankfulness for beneficial instances of magical or miraculous intervention in mundane affairs on the part of a particular heavenly being." Rodríguez-Shadow, 171.

Dolorosa's image is befitting of the home altar *ofrendas* in which Izquierdo places them. These altars, used beyond their prescribed liturgical feast days, generally function as offerings to the deceased, providing mourners a way of dealing with grief and accepting loss of loved ones. In *La Dolorosa* of 1943 (fig. 2.15), pink curtains of *papel picado* part to make way for the *retablo* Virgin image. In this version, the devotional *retablo* painting, set within the actual painting, takes over a relatively large portion of the picture frame, overwhelming the altar encasing it. The *Dolorosa*'s grief takes precedence over the altar's contents of popular objects, and the two milky tears streaming down her cheek become the focal point of the painting.

While a few of Izquierdo's altars are dedicated to the celebration of Day of the Dead, the majority of them contain the image of the Virgin of Sorrows.[31] This appearance of the Virgin was popular in Church decoration and in folk artistry. The naïve painterly brushstroke that Izquierdo brings to her home altars is a modernist device that functions to assert the modern paintings as part of an established, popular tradition.

Devotional images of the Virgin of Sorrows originated in Europe and were introduced to colonial Mexico in ecclesiastical Lamentation scenes, spurring a wide-ranging cult in Latin America.[32] Such apparitions of the Virgin have been instrumental in conveying the church's teaching that suffering is an intensifier of faith. In Reverend Nicolás Rodríguez Juarez's (1667-70– 1734) *Mater Dolorosa, Nuestra Señora de la*

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[31] Aurora Posadas Izquierdo observed, too, that while traditional altars often showcased an image of Christ or of the dead to whom the altar was dedicated, her mother consistently included the Virgin *Dolorosa* in her altar paintings. Personal interview with Aurora Posadas Izquierdo, 31 March 2006.

[32] Marcus B. Burke, *Treasures of Mexican Colonial Painting* (Iowa: Davenport Museum of Art, 1998), 46-47.

Soledad (*Mater Dolorosa, Our Lady of Solitude*) (c. 1700–1734) (fig. 2.16), the devotee is swayed to connect with a particular aspect of the Virgin Mary: she is a woman who not only bears the burden of great sorrow, but also idealizes it. More than mere mood, sadness is perhaps the Virgin Mary's greatest attribute.

In general, the Virgin Mary's image, immeasurably reproduced for popular and religious purposes, held great influence over Mexican women and the social prescription of gender roles.[33] In her landmark study of the significance of the Marian figure in Latin American *mestizo* cultures, Evelyn Stevens argues that the Virgin Mary represents to her adherents "the Ideal Female," modeling how women should act and live: that is, self-sacrificing, pious, submissive, chaste, and humble.[34] The *Marianismo* stereotype is ubiquitous in every social class, and runs counterpart to *machismo*. If, on one hand, Mexican male identity is grounded in *machismo* – defined by a personal and exaggerated sense of masculine virility, aggression and arrogance – then *Marianismo* is the reciprocate: it is the cult of feminine spiritual superiority, which teaches that women are morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men. Men are not expected to elevate themselves morally; they are *como niños* ("like little boys") who cannot help the way they are. It is the unalterable imperfection of men that endows the Mexican woman with her characteristic sadness.[35]

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[33] See Marjorie Becker's work investigating the Marian image *Purísima,* consciously constructed by the Catholic Church to serve as a social model for the women of Michoacan. Marjorie Becker, "Torching La Purísima, Dancing at the Altar: The Construction of Revolutionary Hegemony in Michoacán, 1934-1940," in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, eds. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 247-264.

[34] Evelyn Stevens looks at *Marianismo*, or Marianism, as a deep and widespread sociological phenomenon, extending far beyond the Roman Catholic Church's movement, which has as its object a special veneration of the figure of the Virgin Mary. She observes well-defined patterns of beliefs and behaviors centered on a stereotype of the ideal woman across Latin American *mestizo* cultures. Marianismo has been an organizing tenet of women's studies since the publication of Evelyn Stevens' essay "Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo" in 1973. See Evelyn Stevens, "Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo," in *Confronting Change, Challenging Tradition: Women in Latin American History*, ed. Gertrude M. Yeager (Jaguar Books on Latin America, no. 7. Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc. 1994), 3-17.

The sadness of Mexican women is most visible in the social dictate of mourning. It is customary that upon the death of a family member a woman adopt a mourning habit, and mourning periods vary from three months to up to a lifetime. Beyond just wearing black clothing, the woman 'must also "show respect" for the deceased by refraining from any outward manifestation of happiness or joviality.'[36] For the traditional Mexican woman, compliant with the strictures imposed by the idealized Marian construct of femininity, sorrow was not only an internal feeling but an external, performative ritual of daily existence. This social expression was widespread, leaving an indelible impression of feminine grief in the minds of all Mexicans. Stevens continues:

> By the age of thirty-five, there are few women who have escaped the experience of at least a short period of mourning, and by forty-five, a large majority of women are destined to wear black for the rest of their lives. … As a result… the image of the Latin American woman is almost undistinguishable from the classic religious figure of the *mater dolorosa*, the tear-drenched mother who mourns for her lost son.[37]

Izquierdo herself, like many other Mexican women, did not choose to conform to these social standards of mourning, but as a maturing woman (Izquierdo was in her forties when she began painting her home altar niches) this convention may have resonated with her more profoundly than not. Izquierdo's *ofrendas*, dedicated to the *Mater Dolorosa*, distinctly connect to Mexican women's performance of the social and religious strictures that bound and defined them.

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[35] Ibid., 9, 15.

[36] Ibid., 9-10.

[37] Ibid., 10.

Women's performance of sadness and sacrifice was not only socially deemed to define a good woman and a good mother, but it was also symbolic of all good Mexican citizens, who should be willing to personally sacrifice for the love of their country. In his landmark text *Imagined Communities*, Benedict Anderson argues that the character of nationalism is based on notions of a self-sacrificing love for one's country.[38] The ultimate sacrifice comes through the fatality of heroic men; counterpart, it is a woman's civic duty to grieve.

It is significant to note that Izquierdo chose to repeat this particular type of image of the Virgin Mary, the *Mater Dolorosa*, directly connected to women's relationship with the church and with their role in society, and not, for example, the Virgin of Guadalupe, the patron saint of Mexico, and a foremost symbol of Mexican national identity. For a woman so critically lauded for her quintessential expressions of Mexican-ness, Izquierdo never painted a Virgin of Guadalupe. Directly representative of the nation of Mexico and entrenched in the political and agrarian reform issues of the Revolution, that symbol does not align with her primary artistic motives. In her contribution to *mexicanidad*, I argue that Izquierdo's representations of the Virgin Mary speak not only broadly to the culture of Mexicans but to Mexican *women*, and, more specifically, speak to women's social experience of Mexican Catholicism.

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[38] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (New York: Verso, 1991), 143-144.

In Mexican culture, altars are highly personalized constructions, expressive of their makers' and family's beliefs and concerns. The maker may gravitate to a favorite saint or to a favorite appearance of the Virgin Mary, and together with the collage of items included in the altar, the social and spiritual values of the family are captured visibly.[39] However restrictive the Virgin Mary may be interpreted as a feminine social construct, the various apparitions of the saint are enormously popular with Mexican woman. In areas of the country where the ability to solve ordinary problems is limited by poverty, women routinely turn to miracles as antidotes.[40] Home altars and devotional objects provide a privileged, individualized space where women can express their hopes and desires in times of need.

Izquierdo's altars and devotional *retablos* strategically expose the tension between the reinforcement of religiously inscribed gender roles in the visual culture and the thoughtfully tended spaces of feminine prayer in which creativity thrives and comfort is sought. The artist presents the contradictions inherent in Mexican feminine worship differently than does, for example, Frida Kahlo in *Mi nacimiento* (*My Birth*) of 1932 (fig. 2.17), which overtly questions the accepted ability of devotional imagery to bring spiritual comfort. In this painting, a woman gives birth on a bed in a sparsely furnished room. Graphically rendered, the mother delivers the adult head of Kahlo; the mother's upper body and head is bound and covered by a white sheet. On the wall above her hangs a painting of a weeping Virgin Mary. As in Izquierdo's altars, *Mi nacimiento* clearly ties the *Mater Dolorosa* to the notion of suffering, but in Kahlo's canvas, this suffering is patently visceral. Through the death of the mother and birth of Frida, the painting is interpreted as the distinction between the old and the new generation and, by extension, between the nation's past and its present; the old must die in order that the new thrives. Margaret Lindauer argues that the Catholic presence, part of the old guard, is ineffectual, impotent, and devoid of spiritual comfort. The blank scroll at the bottom of the composition, usually reserved for words of offering or prayer in Mexican *retablos*, reinforces the idea that no miracles took place here.[41] Kahlo's painting betrays her doubts about the ability of the church to help in healing women, either psychologically or physically.

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[39] Beezley, 100.

[40] Becker, 256.

Izquierdo's altar paintings, in comparison to Kahlo's *Mi nacimiento*, do not interrogate the ability of the Virgin or the church to provide spiritual relief. Her paintings reconstruct familiar devotional objects, but they do not judge or politicize overtly the nature of the experience of their worship; they "present neither miracle nor anti-miracle."[42] The interpretation of the devotional experience lies with the devotee, and in the case of Izquierdo's paintings, with the viewer. Ultimately, it is not faith in the power or goodness of religion that Izquierdo is interested in promoting, but rather her faith in the power and goodness of woman: she who creates devotional spaces, and she who suffers before them.

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[41] Margaret A. Lindauer, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo* (CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 89-90, 95, 97.

[42] Robin Adèle Greeley, "Painting Mexican Identities: Nationalism and Gender in the Work of María Izquierdo," *Oxford Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2000), 63-64.

THE WEEPING WOMAN IN THE NATIONAL NARRATIVE

The weeping woman is a firmly embedded symbol in both Mexican visual culture and in folklore. For example, the legend of *La Llorona*, the weeping woman, dates back to the mid-sixteenth century. Transmitted through oral tradition, the origins of *La Llorona* can be traced back to the Aztec goddess Cihuacóatl. There are many variations on the story, but the basic premise is that a beautiful young woman of humble origin fell in love with a rich man; they lived together and they had children. However, the man's mother insisted that he instead marry within in class, and he did so. When the woman found out about his marriage, she killed their children. It is said that when she died and went to heaven, God told her she could not enter until she found her children. Children are told this story to keep them from straying, as *La Llorona* will take any child she finds. The tale is also intended to scare men, who are cautioned both to maintain the social order and to beware of the desperate and untiring vengefulness of women.[43]

La Llorona, like the weeping Mater Dolorosa, is a significant cultural myth that centers around a mother gripped in the pain of loss of her children and defines this woman by her distressed emotional state. The legend, like other representations of women aiming to convey her essential character, reinforces limited and tightly circumscribed notions of Mexican womanhood. With few and steadfast concepts of womanhood inscribed in the Mexican imagination, women writers and artists in modern Mexico faced difficulty writing themselves into the national narrative.[44] The highly visible and dogmatic artistic program of the muralists, in particular, portrayed the story of the modern Mexican nation as one of masculine heroism taking place on a politicized public stage. Izquierdo's cabinet and altar paintings, stark contrast to that of many of her male peers, privilege the domestic interior, a distinctly feminized, spiritual, and private space, as a key site of Mexican identity. Her interior settings, especially altar niches, which were an important facet of her Mexicanist agenda in the 1940s, elevated the social and material value of these spheres, as well as expose layers of authentic Mexican feminine identity otherwise overlooked in the national identity project of the post-Revolutionary era. More so than in traditional art historical still life or genre painting, they assert the role of women – herself included – as producers of Mexican culture and correct the male-centered imagination of the history of the nation.

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[43] C. Alejandra Elenes, "Malinche, Guadalupe, and La Llorona: Patriarchy and the Formation of Mexican National Consciousness," in *Latin America: an interdisciplinary approach*. Eds. Julio López-Arias and Gladys M. Varona-Lacey. (New York: Peter Lang, 1999), 94-95.

The art of post-Revolutionary *mexicanidad*, from the canvas to grand-scale public murals, immortalized such militaristic characters as the Aztec Warrior, the Freedom Fighter, and the Revolutionary Martyr as defenders of Mexican civilization, creating an allegory of social transformation associated with male virility.[45] As passive counterparts to active male leaders, illustrations of grieving women were ubiquitous in Mexican art in the decades following the 1910 Revolution. The psychological strain that Mexico's women bore after the Revolution turned into a symbolic national burden in the visual arts program of *mexicanidad*. This emotional weight is evidenced in the celebrated 1926–27 mural cycle by Diego Rivera in the chapel of the Universidad Autónoma de Chapingo, in *La constante renovación de la lucha revolucionaria – La muerte del campesino (The Perpetual Renewal of Revolutionary Struggle – Death of a Peasant Soldier)* on the chapel's west wall (fig. 2.18). Here, Rivera pictures women, bound tightly in their *rebozos* (shawls), crying over fallen soldiers being prepared for burial. The brim of a hat held in the hand of a soldier standing nearby doubles as a halo around the head of one of the grievers. Rivera bestows the tragic honor in sacrifice upon the active, heroic men; the subsequent pain of the country was expressed by the passive female body. Women were largely relegated to the role of bystanders, helpmates, or sensualized embodiments of the motherland in the panoramic narrative constructed by Rivera and others.

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[44] Jean Franco, *Plotting Women: Gender and Representation in Mexico* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), xx, xxi, 102.

[45] Franco, 102.

José Clemente Orozco's mural cycle at the Colegio de San Ildefonso, Mexico City's National Preparatory School, is another testament to a nation fresh from the carnage of Revolution. In two related panels, the average woman's revolutionary reality is clearly spelled out: a limp, bereft mother is bid farewell by her soldier son (fig. 2.19). In the adjacent section of the mural, a mother and father, their backs to the viewer, lament the wreckage laid of their village; a woman draped in a *rebozo* cradles her baby, while another cradles the body of a male soldier, either exhausted or deceased (fig. 2.20). The tragic honor in sacrifice was bestowed upon the active, heroic men; the subsequent pain of the country was inscribed in the passive female body.

In Francisco Goitia's 1926-27 *Tata Jesucristo* (*Father Jesus*) (fig. 2.21), two women are depicted in a dark, funereal setting. The woman on the left has thrust her head into her hands, and her tensed foot betrays a body physically seized in grief. Next to her, a woman weeps helplessly, and the orangey light cast upon her face by a candle imposes further distorting effects on her expression, already twisted with grief, thereby rendering the woman monstrous in her suffering. “They weep the tears of our race, pain and tears our own and different from others,” Goitia said of the subjects in his painting, “All the sorrow of Mexico is there.”[46] It was a heavy psychological burden that Mexico’s women had to bear after the Revolution, and in a visual project in which the violence and suffering of the nation was manifest in her image, perhaps an even more oppressive symbolic burden.

This trope of the grieving woman entered Izquierdo’s early work in the 1930s, well before it informed the *ofrendas* of the 1940s. *Calvario*, dating a decade prior to the *ofrendas*, refers to a station of the cross (fig. 1.9). It depicts a *rebozo*-clad woman kneeling in prayer before several coffins within a modest structure. The scene is a tribute to the forgotten woman of the Revolution, who wages the lonely battle at home. But, although she is at the center of the image, she is no different than those women featured in a passive and orthodox capacity in Rivera’s mural. Such pictures memorialize woman's victimization rather than her daily achievements in providing for her family in the face of great difficulties. And the ultimate result of the woman's grief is the valorization of the martyred soldier. It is the man's virility and sacrifice, not the emotional expression of the woman, which actively changes society. Here, Izquierdo employed the same patriarchal trope as her male counterparts.

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[46] About this painting, Goitia said, “I also had to wait a very long time before the picture of the two women weeping which is called *Tata Jesucristo* was accomplished. … I tried my models sitting this way and that, but no, I didn’t feel it exactly right. … I then made them come and sit for me on the Day of the Dead, when of their own accord they would be dwelling on sorrow, and little by little I uncovered their sorrows and the revolution and their dead. And they writhed, and one turned her foot up in the pain. Then I knew I had it! Those hands and feet gave their grief the genuine form. I would never have thought of it myself, but of course that is the way grief is, and so I was satisfied at last. They weep the tears of our race, pain and tears our own and different from others. All the sorrow of Mexico is there.” Quoted in Anita Brenner, *Idols Behind Altars* (New York: Payson & Clarke, Ltd., 1929; reprint under the title *Idols Behind Altars: Modern Mexican Art and Its Cultural Roots,* New York: Dover, 2002), 298.

In the 1940s, as World War forced Mexico's social gaze outward, the suffering abroad and anxiety everywhere found expression in tropes once particular to the document of Mexico's violent past. Manuel Rodríguez Lozano applied religious imagery and the mourning woman motif to a reflection on the current global moment in *El holocausto* (*The Holocaust*), 1944 (fig. 2.22). The figure of Christ is supine, curved over a blank tombstone. He is surrounded by nine mourners, wailing in grief, their anger and disbelief cast up towards the heavens. Set against a bleak and foreboding landscape, the figures are rendered in cool, ghostly tones of blue and green. Stark, white cloths draped over their heads give way to sickly pale skin tones and lanky limbs. While stylistically different from the Orozco murals which precede it by almost twenty years, violence and conflict are represented in the same manner, that is, via the martyrdom of the male and the consequent, interminable suffering of the female.

When Izquierdo took on the task of representing war and oppression in the global context, she too employed the mode of illustrating violence by exposing its psychological effects, all of which was written on the female body. In 1945, Izquierdo developed a series of three paintings on "La Tragedia de la Guerra" ("The Tragedy of War"), which were sent to Russia.[47] The title of the work *Víctimas de la Barbarie Nazi en Rusia* (*Victims of Nazi Barbarity in Russia*) (fig. 2.23), describing a scene of a village laid to waste, a dead child, and two bereft women, makes clear that the real victims of social and political violence are the women and children left in its wake.

The means of allowing the grieving woman to represent the ills of violence, the visual trope employed by her peers, is again the basis for a prospective mural, *La muerte del héroe* (*Death of a Hero*) (1945) (fig. 2.24). The composition bears significant resemblance to Lozano's *El holocausto*. A crowd of mourners, many of whom are draped in *rebozos*, gather around a coffin. The hero, then, is not physically present and, as in the example of Orozco, without specific identity; he is an idea transformed into an ideal. The tangible subject of the painting is the mourners, only one man and one boy among eleven women. In some respects, this gender imbalance may be regarded – perhaps by Izquierdo herself – as a way of tribute to the forgotten women of the Revolution, those waging the lonely and challenging battle at home. On the other hand, the only social payoff of their wretched grief is the validation and glorification of the martyred man, in the same manner of Orozco and Lozano. Ultimately, as the phallocentric rhetoric of the national narrative dictated, it is the man's virility and sacrifice that instills change in society, not the emotional output of the woman. The expression of grief of Mexican women serves not to highlight and socially prioritize their condition, but rather to marginalize them; they are not actors in the progress of society, but reactors. In a time in which an emerging women's movement, industrial modernization, and liberal government afforded progressively more rights and opportunities to women, the persistence of the trope of the mourning woman as late as the 1940s points to the fact that the archetypal Mexican woman was still one who suffers.

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[47] Information compiled by Esther de la Herran, "María Izquierdo: Investigación Documental," contained in Volume 1 of the artist's file at the Biblioteca de las Artes, El Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información de Artes Plásticas (CENIDIAP) of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA), Mexico City.

Raised in the religiously conservative state of Jalisco in a very devout household, Izquierdo, like most young women, was expected to follow strict social conventions. She was married at age fourteen, and five years later she, her husband, and young children moved to Mexico City. Immersed in an urban setting, rife with new possibilities, Izquierdo could not continue to endure a life that she did not choose for herself. She divorced, pursued formal artistic training, and lived a bohemian lifestyle as she struggled to forge a successful career as a painter. But despite her bravada and keen ambition, she still faced the difficult and thoroughly modern challenge of being a woman in a man's professional world while raising three children as a single mother, all the while doing so under the scrutiny of a conservative society.

Izquierdo came of age as an artist during a period when there were many shifts in women's social status. During the post-Revolutionary period, women moved into the paid labor sector as a result of economic changes brought about by the Revolution and, later, the Second World War. Multiple women's groups pushed for social reforms and suffrage. But anxieties over perceived social and cultural instability resulting from advances in women's rights led opponents of feminism to push for the fortification of traditional gender roles and patriarchal structures. Women were systematically marginalized in political life throughout and beyond the post-Revolutionary era. In all sectors, motherhood was still regarded as woman's ultimate personal and communal fulfillment. *Machismo*, social taboos, and pressures from the Catholic Church still played a powerful role in defining Mexican feminine identity.

THE IMPERATIVE OF AUTHENTICITY

Erected in households across the country, home altars are considered a rich component of Mexican craft and creativity. Recognition of popular crafts was an important endeavor after the Revolution, a cause championed in exhibitions and publications by figures such as Dr. Atl, Roberto Montenegro, and Jorge Enciso, and the appearance of popular folk crafts and traditions in the "high" art of the era as signifiers of Mexican-ness was widespread. Although her painting was considered high art, Izquierdo was celebrated as an artist with a genuine understanding of native and rural traditions, and her altar paintings were recognized at the time for "their delightful indigenous ingenuousness."[48] Her naïve painterly technique, intended to recall the folk painting of regional artisans, heightened the effect and functioned to draw her modernist paintings into the direct lineage of an established, popular tradition. Given its rich cultural history and ubiquity, the home altar was an effective motif for Izquierdo to use to tap into a variety of aspects of Mexican popular tradition, ritual and craft.

Through her paintings and her words, Izquierdo and her critics carefully mediated her public persona as an authentically Mexican artist and authentically Mexican woman.

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[48] The anonymous author of the article refers to Izquierdo's "altares (con su deliciosa ingenuidad indigena)" in "María Izquierdo ha clausurado su exposición," *Novedades,* 4 November 1947.

Though Izquierdo's past was not entirely mythologized, certain aspects of her childhood were deliberately highlighted, and others masked. Hers was a genuine but well-managed authenticity.

Punctuating the local, quotidian authenticity of her own painting, Izquierdo inscribed her own possessions into her domestic altars, still life tableaus and cabinet compositions.[49] The 1942 *Alacena* is stocked with toys and figurines; the Adam and Eve figurines and the small horses, for example, reappear in various altar and cabinet paintings for years to come. Through their familiarity, both as common domestic objects and as repeated elements throughout her oeuvre, the trinkets in Izquierdo's paintings lend a sense of intimacy to her work and, as an extension, to the artist herself, as she offers the viewer an apparent glimpse into her home, her world, her very thoughts and memories.

The perceived intimacy with the painting, and by extension, with the painter, complicates the reading of Izquierdo's work. More than establishing a general connection with Mexico's past and present material traditions, many of Izquierdo's paintings are assumed to connect to her personal experience, thereby further authenticating the Mexican character of her work. Contemporary critics of her work teased out of Izquierdo's paintings evidence of the artist's rural authenticity, and tangibility of the quotidian was important to the critical success of this woman with the "hands that grew bolder in the province."[50] The domestic altars and other paintings with religious iconography particularly conjure for the viewer an association with Izquierdo's humble beginnings. Izquierdo's birthplace of San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, was a radically conservative area that nourished the Cristero movement, where *mestizo* and Catholic traditions of the nineteenth century thrived.[51] In a 1996 exhibition catalog, Teresa del Conde writes:

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[49] Aurora Posadas Izquierdo, María Izquierdo's daughter, has been quoted many times in saying that her mother painted objects with which she lived. See, for example, Ferrer, 20; and Terri Geis, "Kahlo's Contemporaries: Women Artists in Mexico in the Postrevolutionary Period," in connection with the exhibition at the University of Essex, 2005, http://www.essex.ac.uk/kahlo/essay.htm.

> For my part, when I confront the paintings of María, I have a sense of infinite nostalgia. … I find myself making an effort to imagine the painter at the different stages of her life: the little girl in a small provincial town whose days are measured by the bells of the sanctuary from the time of her birth; the child at Lent making her offering on Good Friday in a kind of *tableau vivant*…[52]

Teresa del Conde, like critics before her, perpetuates the legend of Izquierdo's simple, pious, rural life as "ideological support for her work."[53] Directly linking her artwork to an imagined construction of time and place, del Conde manages to both exalt Izquierdo's work over other artists without such experience, and also limit the view of her work as autobiographical and instinctual, rather than intellectual. The critic's "infinite sense of nostalgia" when she looks at Izquierdo's work might challenge, more than it supports, the artist's authenticity. Nostalgia, different from memory, connotes a static, distorted idealism for things from a lost past.

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[50] "Siempre recién llegada del campo, aquí, en la cuidad, vive una mujer con manos alfareras. Manos que le crecieron en la provincia,…" Jose Muñoz Cota, "María Izquierdo," *El Nacional*, 11 July 1946.

[51] Carlos Monsiváis, "María Izquierdo: La Idolatria de lo Visible," in *María Izquierdo* (México: Casa de Bolsa CREMI, 1986), 12.

[52] Teresa del Conde, "A Nostalgic Melancholy," in *María Izquierdo, 1902-1955*, 9.

[53] Greeley, 64.

Much of the current accepted knowledge of Izquierdo's upbringing is influenced by the biographical account offered by MacKinley Helm, a writer and collector from the United States, who included the artist in his book *Modern Mexican Painters*, published in 1941:

> María remembers her childhood as a kind of diurnal penance of six o'clock Masses and solitary, friendless hours in a garden which rarely flowered. Many of the Masses, she was told, were celebrated for the repose of the souls of her parents: her mother, a Tarascan Indian, who had died in 1907 when María was in swaddling clothes; and her father, a mestizo laborer, who quickly joined his wife in the grave. María lived with her grandmother and an aunt, excessively religious ladies whose life, according to the custom of that time, daily revolved around the disciplines of the Church. The only excitement which seems ever to have interrupted the pious grandmother's round of prayers and the small granddaughter's obligatory meditations on mortality was occasioned by the infrequent visits of another aunt who was a nun.[54]

In truth, contrary to Helm's account, Izquierdo was left in the care of her grandparents and aunts because her mother – alive and well – traveled frequently with her second husband, who was a doctor.[55] His description of young María's time in her family's care is rather morose, and remains a memorable element of Izquierdo's childhood "lore." Izquierdo, however, challenged the veracity of Helm's claims. Izquierdo was a frequent contributor of art criticism and reviews to *Hoy* magazine from 1942 to 1943. In a 1942 profile of Ricardo Martínez, an emerging Mexican painter, Izquierdo offered a vague yet inflammatory statement regarding MacKinley Helm when she wrote, "I don't have the honor of knowing Martínez personally, and because of this, with regard to his biography,

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[54] MacKinley Helm, *Modern Mexican Painters: Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros and other artists of the Social Realist School* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941; reprint, New York: Dover, 1989), 143.

[55] María de Jesus González, *The Art of Maria Izquierdo: Formative Years 1928 to 1934* (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1998), 68, 100, fn 46.

I will not give any personal information on this occasion (I don't want to imitate certain "transcribers" of books about paintings and painters that invent biographies of artists, as is the case of the novelesque work of Doctor MacKinley Helm, for example)…"[56] From this statement alone, it is impossible to ascertain with what specific portion of her biography Izquierdo was so displeased, be it the fabrication of the deaths of both parents or the overall negative light in which her childhood was cast. Or, perhaps Helm caught her in too honest a moment, one in which she lost control of the spin on the critical commodity that was her idyllic rural past.[57]

In a 1943 interview, Izquierdo openly acknowledged her Catholic childhood, though she omitted any sense of its oppressiveness: "I was brought up in a completely mystical environment because my childhood was spent with my family, who was very Catholic."[58] This puts a positive, even beatific spin on what Helm postured as a traumatic past. This version of the pastoral narrative preserves the enigma of her youth, while it also enables Izquierdo to maintain her aura of authenticity and creative authority to represent indigenous Mexican culture. *Mi tía* (*My Aunt*), of 1945 (fig. 2.25) reconstructs Izquierdo's childhood accordingly; Izquierdo visions herself a little halo-ed angel, and her aunt, draped in robes recalling the Virgin Mary, is enthroned on a traditional Mexican chair.

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[56] "No tengo el honor de conocer a Martínez personalmente, por lo que no daré en esta ocasión, respecto de su biografía, ningún dato (no quiero imitar a algunos 'escribidores' de libros sobre pintura y pintores, que inventan biografías de los artistas, como el caso de la obra libresca del doctor MacKinley Helm, por ejemplo)…" María Izquierdo, "Nuevos pintores mexicanos," *Hoy,* 30 May 1942, 47-48. Quoted in *María Izquierdo* (México: Casa de Bolsa CREMI, 1986), 131.

[57] In 1938, presumably when Helm was collecting material for his book, Izquierdo painted an *ex-voto* for the author. It mimicked the primitive style of folk *ex-votos* and was inscribed with a personalized prayer. Whatever her intentions behind this gift, it is possible that the painting reinforced notions that he had about her Mexican Catholic upbringing. Also, Catha Paquette confirms that Helm commissioned Izquierdo to paint a portrait of his niece, entitled *Portrait of Cathie* (1939), and also published a photograph of Izquierdo and Raúl Uribe with Helm. See Catha Paquette, "U.S. Perceptions of Art Both Mexican and Modern: The Collecting, Publishing, and Curatorial Activities of MacKinley Helm," in *Patrocinio, colección y circulación de las artes: XX Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte*, 643.

[58] "Me eduqué en un ambiente completamente místico porque mi niñez la pasé con mi familia que era muy católica." Consuelo Colon R., "Actividades de la Mujer Mexicana: María Izquierdo," *El Universal Grafico*, 24 September 1943, 12.

Izquierdo may have romanced her Catholicism, but nonetheless, Izquierdo's meaningful connection to Catholic tradition cannot be dismissed. Home altars were, as del Conde infers, a part of Izquierdo's childhood home, and grand altar constructions were also publicly displayed during religious festivals in her hometown. Izquierdo's daughter Aurora believes that these altars left a great impression on her mother. While she generally did not set up altars specifically for the purpose of recreating them in paint, in keeping with her family's and with Mexican tradition, Izquierdo did create such altars in her home for her own family at times of the major religious feasts. One year, Aurora recalls, their altar was so elaborate and expansive that it took up an entire room.[59]

A photograph taken in the 1950s by Izquierdo's close friend Lola Alvarez Bravo (1907–1993) (fig. 2.26) reinforces the connection between Izquierdo and her painted home altars. Alvarez Bravo photographed Izquierdo in front of *Viernes de juguetería* so that she appears imbedded within the cabinet/altar itself. The photograph transposes Izquierdo into the traditional spot of the Holy Mother who, like so many Mexican women, shares her name, María. Explicitly assuming the role of the Virgin Mary, the photograph of Izquierdo manifests the traditional ideal of the saint as the model for the Mexican woman. At the same time, this model is given a face-lift, which shifts her from a paragon of vulnerability and sorrow to one of distinct pride and strength. With her erect posture, head held high, and unwavering gaze, Izquierdo is sanctified as a veritable force of nature.

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[59] Personal interview with Aurora Posadas Izquierdo, 31 March 2006.

In February 1948, Izquierdo suffered a serious stroke, paralyzing the right side of her body and setting off a period of grave financial trouble and depression. Izquierdo soldiered her way through a gradual and difficult recovery. Izquierdo's *Dolorosa con trigo* (*Dolorosa with Wheat*) (fig. 2.27)*,* her first painting since her illness, an *ofrenda*, debuted as a reproduction in a March 1949 article in *Excelsior*. She reported that she executed this painting, dedicated to the Virgin of Sorrows, with tremendous effort, using her left hand to guide and support her favored right hand: "It is the most 'izquierdo' ('left') work that I have," she joked to the press. While her compromised physical ability is evident in the shaky brushstroke, the author of the article was no less impressed with the effort: "Its color seems even richer than before; there is poetry and drama in it. The serene pain of the spiritual and dark-skinned virgin is surprising."[60] The painting – and the Virgin depicted within it – are even more "Izquierdo" than the artist's pun about the assistance of her left hand implies; it is impossible to view this *Dolorosa* without imagining Izquierdo herself, both the culmination of her artistic merits and the painful experience she was enduring.

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[60] The article reads, "La interrogamos si había vuelto a pintar; nos muestra su primer cuadro después de su grave enfermedad: 'Es mi primer cuadro desde que he vuelto a la vida,' dice emocionada, y agrega: 'Lo pinté todavía con mucho esfuerzo, ayudando a mi mano derecha con la izquierda,' y dice sonriendo: 'es el cuadro más "izquierdo" que tengo.' El cuadro es un retablo popular, pintado al gouache, en colores rojos y azules; su color se nos antoja más rico aun que antes; hay en el drama y poesía. Sorprende el dolor sereno de la virgen morena y espiritual." M.T.P., "María Izquierdo: La Pintora Recobra su Salud," *Excelsior,* 7 March 1949.

The proximity of the execution of this painting to Izquierdo's stroke and subsequent recovery grants an understanding of the altar as the *ofrenda*, the offering that it is, like the altar paintings that preceded it several years earlier. She revisits the *Mater Dolorosa* at a time when it is most significant to her: "It's my first painting since coming back to life," she informed her interviewer. It is a testament to a woman's pain and grief, and further, to her endurance of those states. Izquierdo, the maker of this altar, identifies with the suffering of the woman and the awe and relief that the resurrection – at least momentarily – afforded her. Underlining her personal connection to this painting, an archival photograph reveals that Izquierdo hung the *Dolorosa con trigo* in her studio (fig. 2.28).[61]

Scholarship generally elides the question of María Izquierdo's own adult connection to Catholicism. Her abundant religious iconography produced in the 1940s is understood primarily as a manifestation of nostalgia of her youth in Jalisco and a document of popular Mexican culture. The prevailing voices of the period's largely anticlerical, even anti-Catholic, Marxist intellectual and political milieu have resulted in the assumption that virtually all modern Mexican artists distanced themselves from religion. In fairness, Izquierdo never spoke of her work as a direct reflection or celebration of her faith, as did more outspoken Catholic artists of the day like Angel Zárraga and Jean Charlot. Her daughter Aurora Posadas Izquierdo confirms that her mother did not actively practice her religion. But while she did not go to Mass every Sunday, she did go to church at times "when she felt moved to do so." As Aurora put it, "it was something inside of her."[62] The fact that Izquierdo's first painting after her first major illness in early 1948 was another one of these altars was, to her daughter, further evidence that these altars held a special meaning for her, that they genuinely touched something inside of her. Izquierdo's employment of religious iconography relates not only to the spiritualism of Mexico's women but also may represent her negotiation with her own complex Catholic identity.

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[61] Aurora Posadas Izquierdo confirms that the photograph of the artist's studio with the *Dolorosa con trigo* hanging above the bookcase was taken in Izquierdo's lifetime. Personal interview with Aurora Posadas Izquierdo, 31 March 2006.

While biographical readings at times make for faulty analytical foundations, and to which women artists are typically vulnerable, it is worthwhile to explore Izquierdo's personal connection to the religious traditions represented in her art. Her past *did* inform her mature work, but it did so beyond the procurement of nostalgic tokens of a rural Catholicism. The above exploration of her biography – including the inconsistencies and ambiguities revealed therein – is intended to enrich, not replace, an understanding of the intellectual and cultural drives at play in Izquierdo's career and in her artwork, further underlining the complex experience of the Mexican Catholic woman in the modern era.

CONCLUSION

Izquierdo revered Mexico's cultural traditions but rebelled against its attendant social conventions. These two threads are inextricably woven into the home altar paintings, which simultaneously refer to enduring ritual practice, creativity, and familial community, while at the same time conjure the social mores and domestic constraints that afflict their makers. Izquierdo's *Dolorosas* and related representations of feminine piety may not reinvent Mexico's image of women, but they do portray the inherent complexities of her role. Using the altars to explore aspects of feminine identity, Izquierdo presented a woman-centered form of *mexicanidad*, giving voice to women's relationships with the past, with the home, and with the physical and spiritual world. She inserted women into the male narrative of Mexican identity by asserting their role as viable creators and carriers of the national tradition.

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[62] Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

The Mother/Virgin in Modern Mexican Art, Culture, and Self-Portraiture

Women in Mexico achieved significant, if not absolute, political gains in the revolutionary era. Activist groups after the Revolution diligently fought for a variety of mother and child legal protections. Mexican women of the period collaborated in expanding health and welfare programs for women and children, and the commitment by the Cárdenas administration to improve their lot was reinforced in July 1939 when the National Committee for Mother and Child was established in Mexico City.[1] While these were positive and sorely needed measures toward social justice, it is important to note that many of the political advances made after the Revolution were maternalist, devised specifically for mothers, rather than broadly conceived advances for women in general.[2] Reinforcing cultural notions of the sanctity of motherhood and the priority of this feminine role, these advances continued to preserve the patriarchal structures of the

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[1] See Shirlene Soto, *Emergence of the Modern Mexican Woman: Her Participation in Revolution and Struggle for Equality, 1910-1940* (Denver, CO: Arden Press, 1990), 2, 124, 125. See also Sarah A. Buck, "The Meaning of the Women's Vote in Mexico," in *The Women's Revolution in Mexico, 1910–1953*, eds. Stephanie Mitchell and Patience A. Schell (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 88.

[2] Nichole Sanders, "Improving Mothers," in *The Women's Revolution in Mexico, 1910–1953*, eds. Stephanie Mitchell and Patience A. Schell (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 201; and Patience Schell, "Conclusion," in *The Women's Revolution in Mexico*, 207.

Mexican economy and society. While women were entering the labor force in increasing numbers, the state encouraged the development of domestic industries, which were home-based small businesses set by women to contribute to family budget without neglecting their role as mothers and housewives. While women gained a degree of economic power, conventional gender roles were preserved.[3] Mothers, rather than women, had visibility and value in Mexican culture, politics, and nationalism. In this era, in which women still remained disenfranchised at the national level, "motherhood was the only acknowledged form of female citizenship."[4]

As an artist, a public figure, and a mother, Izquierdo occupied an unusual place in the social reality of gender politics. Motherhood was a seminal part of Izquierdo's own identity. When she separated from her husband Candido Posadas in 1929, Izquierdo maintained sole custody of their three children.[5] In her art and in her personal statements, Izquierdo demonstrated a high regard for motherhood, widely seen by conservative- and liberal-minded Mexicans alike as woman's paramount social role. The sanctity and importance of motherhood are evidenced in her numerous mother and child portraits, which conflate the figure of the woman with the Universal Mother, the Virgin Mary, and the Mexican Mother.

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[3] "In 1940, women represented 28 percent of the economically active population of Mexico City, from which 44 percent worked as domestic servants." Sandra Aguilar-Rodríguez, "Cooking Modernity: Nutrition Policies, Class, and Gender in 1940s and 1950s Mexico City." *The Americas*, 64:2 (October 2007), 198-199.

[4] Mary K. Coffey. "Angels and Prostitutes: José Clemente Orozco's Catharsis and the Politics of Female Allegory in 1930s Mexico," *The New Centennial Review* 4, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 207.

[5] María de Jesús González notes that Candido Posadas remained an active presence in his children's lives and also provided financial support. See González, 90. However amicable their situation, the decision to divorce could not have been an easy one for Izquierdo in this era. While legislation finally allowed for divorce in Mexico, Catholic familial traditions still strongly looked down on it. According to one contemporary source, "the woman who divorced her husband did so against the opposition of all her relatives. The man might be a scoundrel, diseased, and morally corrupt, but usually her family would rather see her dead than divorced." Lillian Estelle Fisher, "The Influence of the Present Mexican Revolution upon the Status of Mexican Women." *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 22:1 (February 1942): 214.

One prime example is *Maternidad (Motherhood)* of 1943 (fig. 3.1), today at the Museo del Arte Moderno in Mexico City. In it, a dark-skinned Mexican woman cradles her son in her arms. Clothed in blue with a bright red *rebozo* (a woman's shawl and a distinctly Mexican garment) draped over her head and shoulders, the colors and veiling of the figure are consistent with institutional representations of the Virgin. The figure's garments are also similar to those in the Mater Dolorosa *retablos* seated in Izquierdo's home altar paintings. Behind the Madonna, a backdrop of hazy, cottony clouds obscures a view of sun and blue sky. At closer inspection, the soft golden sunlight that radiates behind the hazy cloud cover forms a halo behind her head. Notably, and by no accident, this Mexican Virgin also bears a distinct resemblance to Izquierdo herself, the Artist Mother who created the work of art. As a self-portrait, the constructed identities in the painting are reflexive, lending Izquierdo the same attributes proffered to her subject. Simultaneously tapping into issues of race, gender, societal values, religion, and public notoriety, the motherhood trope was for Izquierdo a highly effective vessel of personal, cultural, and national identity.

At the same time, Izquierdo's personal identification with her motherhood paintings, though relevant, should not be overstated. In the 1940s, when Izquierdo explored the motherhood motif in depth, she was in her forties, and her three children, born before the early 1920s, were grown.[6] The intensity of the struggles and joys of motherhood were not the same for her in the 1940s as she would have experienced earlier, when she painted the double portrait *Niñas durmiendo* (*Sleeping Girls*) (fig. 3.2), circa 1930. This tender and deeply intimate image of two young girls tucked in bed together captures a parent's perspective on her children, while Izquierdo's maternity portraits of the 1940s present a perspective on the multi-layered role of motherhood. It is necessary to look beyond the biographical considerations and understand her motherhood paintings as a reflection of Izquierdo's participation in a public discourse.

This chapter examines Izquierdo's motherhood paintings and related self-portraits of the 1940s in the context of Mexican modern art and culture. Like her home altars, this body of work illuminates Izquierdo's challenges in trying to portray woman in the predominantly masculine national narrative. In many of these paintings, Izquierdo appropriates traditional Catholic imagery to portray the archetypal Mexican mother. In some ways, these images challenge and subvert the traditional perception of the Virgin Mary, and offer up a revised model for Mexican women. On the other hand, the Virgin

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[6] Scholarly sources on María Izquierdo do not report the exact years of her children's births. However, biographical accounts place María, Candido Posadas, and their three children in Mexico City in 1923; it could be assumed that all three of the children were born before that year. See, for example, Elena Poniatowska, *Las siete cabritas* (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 2000), 89. Adriana Zavala cites the same in "Tamayo's Women: Figures of an Alternative Modernism," in *Tamayo: Modern Icon Reinterpreted* (California: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 2007), 213. However, in a photograph, according to sources, taken in or around 1925, María Izquierdo is pictured with only two children: Carlos, the eldest, stands beside her, and she holds on her lap Amparo, a toddler. Aurora, the youngest child, is not pictured, possibly because the picture was taken before her birth. If Aurora Posadas Izquierdo's birthplace was Mexico City, after 1923-25, she was certainly born before María and Candido divorced in 1929, which would still mean that Aurora was in her teens, and no longer a child, by the decade of the 1940s.

Mary model amenably works within conventional social bounds; Izquierdo deploys the same symbols and constrictive referents propagated by the church and the dominant masculine culture. Do Izquierdo's "everywoman" Madonnas play into the patriarchal order; or do they subvert that order; or do they make a heroine out of the only role in which society allows her to be one? The conflicting forces in Izquierdo's paintings mirror the social, gendered bind in which modern Mexican women found themselves at large.

Beyond her intention to picture Mexican women in the nation's visual arts, Izquierdo also intended to codify herself into the ranks of Mexico's greatest artists and cultural public figures. Through her self-portraits, which call on associations to the universal mother, ethnic identity, and religious iconography, Izquierdo demonstrates her ambition to publicly figure herself as an icon of Mexican culture and illuminates the performative nature of feminine identity in Mexican society. This chapter considers parallels between the self-portraiture of Izquierdo and Frida Kahlo, demonstrating ways in which Izquierdo's self-portraiture asserted the artist's presence in a male-dominated field, positioning the artist both as the creator of important works of art as well as the object of the public gaze.

THE PRIMORDIAL MOTHER IN MEXICAN CULTURE

Motherhood is a complex social, psychological, and historical concept. Indeed, the notion of motherhood is so central to the Mexican psyche it is difficult to extricate the construction of the identity of mothers from the identity of women in general. Ideas about the character of the Mexican mother stem, in large part, from two powerful cultural symbols: the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico's patron saint, who is a positive but submissive representation of maternity; and La Malinche, the so-called traitor of Mexico, who is an active but destructive, negative figure. Early prototypes of La Malinche and the Virgin of Guadalupe can be found in Mesoamerican legends, and the historical development of the two figures coincided with religious, political, and nationalist concerns. Roger Bartra argues that these two "primordial" archetypes are at the root of the Mexican spirit and form the "essential image of the modern Mexican woman."[7] A brief examination of these primordial mother myths is therefore helpful in teasing out the multiple meanings in representations of mothers and, more broadly, of women in Mexican art.

La Malinche

Malinche, as the Spaniards called her, was a Nahua slave girl who was handed over to the infamous *conquistador* Hernán Cortés by Tabascan chiefs to act as an interpreter and intermediary between Cortés and the Aztecs. She later became a mistress to Cortés and gave birth to his son, Don Martín Cortés, who is considered the first *mestizo* (of mixed European and indigenous American ancestry). Malinche functions as Mexico's mythical Eve, and like the figure in the Genesis story, she is interpreted in multiple, simultaneous ways: she is a traitor,[8] she is a victim, she is the mother of the new *mestizo* Mexican people. Her sexual relationship with Cortés gave rise to the pejorative term *la chingada*, a term which Octavio Paz explores at length in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* and defined, in short, as "the Mother forcibly opened, violated or deceived."[9] As such, and at the heart of the problem of Mexican identity, the Mexican people are the product of "violation, abduction or deceit."[10]

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[7] Roger Bartra, *The Cage of Melancholy: identity and metamorphosis in the Mexican character,* trans. Christopher J. Hall (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 147-150. Bartra believes that it is possible "to view the Malinche and the Virgin of Guadalupe as two incarnations of the same original myth. The two Marys derive from the archetype of the Mexican woman." Ibid., 148.

Roger Bartra postulates that the formulation of the legend of Malinche "is directly related to the establishment of the idea of nationhood." With the advent of Mexico's independence from Europe in the nineteenth century came the need to invent a myth of origination, a fatherland, and a family of founding "heroes and traitors."[11] He contends that:

> The raw materials necessary for her creation already existed in the sixteenth century; but it was not until after Independence that a cultural catalyst was initiated and a complex myth about the Mexican woman began to be codified. She is both tender and violated, protector and licentious, sweet and traitorous, maternal Virgin and Babylonian female.[12]

The stimulus for cultivating national narratives and primordial myths in the nineteenth century resurfaced after the 1910 Revolution, as the country once again drew upon its cultural heritage to articulate a cohesive national identity. Malinche, the reluctant and maligned Mexican mother, was codified in the new national narrative, which had ramifications for negotiations of modern identity as well as for the representation of women.

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[8] In the vernacular, the term *malinchista* refers to a disloyal Mexican.

[9] Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico*, trans. Lysander Kemp (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 79.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Bartra, 155-56.

[12] Ibid., 158.

After the Revolution, Malinche was an effective character through which the political complexities of *mestizaje* could be considered. In 1925, the publication of José Vasconcelos' treatise *La Raza Cósmica* (*The Cosmic Race*) advanced sociopolitical rhetoric which celebrated the Latin American people's mixture of multiple bloodlines, an argument that ran counter to colonial era philosophy which categorized races and interracial mixing hierarchically, as evidenced in New World *casta* paintings of the eighteenth century.[13] At the same time, however, progressive revolutionary ideology aimed to bring light to the historical and systematic injustices done to the native peoples inflicted by the white European, starting with the seminal moment of the "rape" of Malinche. Reconciling the two strands of rhetoric was not simple, and the feelings of ambivalence about Malinche's position in the history of Mexico were evident in her depictions in modern art.

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[13] Secretary of Education (1921-1924) José Vasconcelos published his treatise *La Raza Cósmica* (*The Cosmic Race*) in 1925. He argued that through generations of interbreeding between the four main races identified by Vasconcelos (what he called Black, Indian, Mongol, and White) a fifth race would emerge that carries the best traits of each of the four races. Latin America was a unique place to spawn this fifth race, where the blood of all four races already existed and mixed. However, the ideology surrounding the "cosmic race," proposed in the 1920s and renewed as a driving force in 1940s *mexicanidad*, was not as inclusive and affirming as summaries of the treatise would lead one to believe. Vasconcelos' enthusiasm for the mixing of the races into a "super-race" held the promise that the white European blood would cleanse and purify the Indian blood. Herein, the national project of *mexicanidad* sought to draw Indians into a pan-Mexican identity by forging a connection to a lighter-skinned racial identity. Joanne Hershfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna: Women, Nation, and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 138.

In modern Mexican art, Malinche is famously depicted by José Clemente Orozco in his fresco *Cortés y la Malinche* (fig. 3.3), painted in 1926 in a stairwell vault at the National Preparatory School in Mexico City. Cortés is rendered in a manner that makes him appear as though chiseled from marble: he is muscular, pale, rigid, strong, and cold. The quality of his appearance sharply differs from that of Malinche, with her soft feminine curves and warm skin tone. David Craven praises Orozco's ability to depict the couple in a way that "evinces a tendency neither to lament nor to celebrate their unequal union without qualification."[14] Cortés and Malinche hold each other's right hand in a gesture of unity; but Cortés crosses his left arm over Malinche's upper body as though to restrain her. His left leg likewise presses into Malinche, while his right foot is clamped over the limp and lifeless body of a dark-skinned male, who represents the Indian race that was decimated and subjugated by the Conquest. Malinche, physically trapped by Cortés, closes her eyes. A sense of ambivalence also imbues *El sueño de la Malinche* (*The Dream of Malinche*) (1939) (fig. 3.4) by Antonio Ruiz.[15] The body of the slumbering Malinche serves as the ground supporting a Mexican town, upholding the notion of the Mexican nation having been built upon her actions. The small-scale town seems peaceful, but the lightening above Malinche's head suggests that her dream, or conscience, may not be so.[16]

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[14] David Craven, *Art and Revolution in Latin America, 1910-1990* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 49.

[15] Rita Eder, "*El sueño de la Malinche* de Antonio Ruiz y María Magdalena: algunas afinidades," in *Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte: La imagen política* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2006), 93-112.

[16] Izquierdo would later pick up the exposed brick visual reference in *Trigo crecido*, 1940 (fig. 2.9) and *El gato sabio*, 1943 (fig. 2.11). Jacqueline Barnitz notes that the exposed

Izquierdo explored the theme of the primordial mother myth, but she did not directly undertake the theme of La Malinche; rather, bypassing the racial and nationalist issues inextricably connected to Mexico's Eve, she turned to the Old Testament. Izquierdo's *Adán y Eva (Adam and Eve)* of 1946 (fig. 3.5) depicts the climax of the biblical Genesis story. The Garden of Eden is translated into Izquierdo's Mexico, one in which flat earth stretches to a distant horizon and local flora populate the landscape, though here, more lush and green than in her often barren incarnations of the land. While the figures quaintly hold delicate branches to obscure their genitalia from the viewer, between them the serpent suggestively writhes its way through a crevice in the Tree of Knowledge. Eve and Adam's eyes are intently locked as the fated apple passes, lightly suspended, from one hand to the other.

Like the aforementioned Malinche paintings, Izquierdo's Garden of Eden scene hangs in a state of ambivalence, as each character in the scene bears equal responsibility for the actions taken, rather than placing all the blame on one individual. The serpent, the architect of the evil plan, is in the center of the composition, and both Adam's and Eve's hands are on the apple, making both actors complicit in the moment. In a 1946 newspaper article discussing this and other recent works by Izquierdo, Jorge Juan Crespo de la Serna described *Adán y Eva* as both archaic and very modern.[17] Indeed, her composition, though rendered in the naïve painterly style of the modern Mexican School, is also very

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brick motif in Ruiz's painting is a nod to the French surrealist René Magritte. Jacqueline Barnitz, *Twentieth-century art of Latin America* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2001), 109.

[17] "…un "Adán y Eva," de un sello a la vez arcaico y modernísimo…" Jorge J. Crespo de la Serna, "En el estudio de María Izquierdo." *Excelsior*, 9 Jun 1946.

close to art historical representations. For example, in a 1504 engraving by Albrecht Dürer (fig. 3.6), Adam and Eve are posed with bodies frontal and heads turned toward each other, and the Tree of Knowledge, holding the serpent, stands between them. As in Dürer's engraving, Izquierdo's Eve covers herself with an apple branch broken from the tree.

Virgin of Guadalupe

In 1531, ten years after the arrival of Cortés, the Virgin Mary is said to have revealed herself to a poor Indian man, christened with the name Juan Diego, and left her image inscribed on his cape. The miraculous event took place on the hill of Tepeyac, which had also marked the site of a destroyed Aztec temple to the goddess Tonantzin, the sacred personification of earth mother. A century following Juan Diego's vision, a Spanish bishop initiated a program to draw straying Indians back into the fold of the church, and the Virgin of Guadalupe was officially established as Mexico's own Indian Virgin.[18]

In contrast to La Malinche, the Virgin of Guadalupe is the Good Mother of the Mexican people: she is the spiritual, self-sacrificing, suffering mother of Christ. A vital figure in the institution of the Catholic Church, in popular practices of faith, and even in secular circles, the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe is ubiquitous in Mexico. The Virgin is consistently depicted in a full-length portrait, draped in a veil and robes, with her head turned downward in a gesture of humility and her hands in prayer. Abstracted rays of light, emanating from behind her, frame the figure. Scholars agree that this constructed icon, pious and submissive, has played an immeasurable role in Mexican Catholicism and in influencing Mexican attitudes towards the female sex.[19]

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[18] Joanne Hershfield, *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Women, 1940-1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 22.

Throughout history, the Virgin of Guadalupe's image has been employed for multiple purposes. Originally symbolic of and used for the religious conversion of the indigenous people of Mexico, the icon was appropriated by the most notorious leaders of rebel armies, Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata, during the 1910 Revolution. Zapatistas wore her image in the band of their wide-brimmed hats, a practice immortalized in Fernando Leal's *Zapatistas descansando (Zapatistas at Rest)*, 1921 (fig. 3.7). When affiliated with profound social and agrarian reforms in the revolutionary era, Guadalupe's image became "a viable symbol of freedom for all classes."[20]

The representation of the Indian Virgin as a political symbol of struggle for freedom and as an emblem of the masses was important to modern Mexican artists who were concerned with establishing a national art. At the National Preparatory School in Mexico City, the artistic laboratory from which the modern mural movement would evolve, Fermín Revueltas employed the religious symbol to convey revolutionary sentiments. His mural, *Alegoría de la Virgen de Guadalupe (Allegory of the Virgin of Guadalupe)*, 1922-23 (fig. 3.8), fills a high wall framed by a large rounded arch; the Virgin is positioned at the pinnacle of the composition. She stands in a crescent moon, typical of Guadalupana imagery and consistent with Baroque representations of the Madonna in Glory.[21] There is a clear hierarchical structure: the Virgin, at the top, is buttressed by attendant angels, and beneath them cluster the Mexican people. Revueltas, however, did not want to depict a traditional devotional image, but rather, as the title suggests, an allegorical metaphor consistent with revolutionary ideology. Despite the ranked ordering of the figures, there are significant likenesses between the holy and the lay people. All figures bear similar racial characteristics, and all wear simple garments. Like the Virgin of Guadalupe, who is a mother, some of the women depicted in the mural are pregnant, and others carry their children. The focal point of the lower right portion of the large mural, in particular, is a Mexican mother cradling her baby in her arms; flanked by women, some draped in *rebozos* in a manner similar to the Virgin, all eyes are cast upon this new life. Underlining the revolutionary significance of this mural, these maternal figures are accompanied by the soldiers who fought for independence and land, but foremost, Revueltas emphasizes the importance of mothers and their extraordinary power to generate life. Guadalupe, then, her essence echoed in the portrayal of the Mexican women around her, signifies the endurance of the Mexican motherland and its people.

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[19] "It is no secret to anyone that Mexican Catholicism is centered about the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe," writes Octavio Paz in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, 84. See also Bartra, 154. Marjorie Becker investigates the Marian image *Purísima,* consciously constructed by the Catholic Church to serve as a social model for the women of Michoacan. Marjorie Becker, "Torching La Purísima, Dancing at the Altar: The Construction of Revolutionary Hegemony in Michoacán, 1934-1940," in *Everyday Forms of State Formation: Revolution and the Negotiation of Rule in Modern Mexico*, eds. Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniel Nugent (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994), 247-264.

[20] Jeanette Favrot Peterson, "The Virgin of Guadalupe: Symbol of Conquest or Liberation?" *Art Journal* 51:4 (Winter 1992), 45.

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[21] In Christian art, the moon can be a symbol of fertility. The crescent moon often has been used in representations of the Immaculate Conception and as a symbol of Mary's glory. In some Baroque compositions, the Madonna is depicted atop a crescent moon in combination with a globe.

Images of Indian Virgins created after the Revolution initiated a lasting legacy in the modern Mexican imagination. Izquierdo, working with the theme of motherhood some twenty years after Revueltas, was able to draw upon many of the same conventions established in his 1922-23 mural. Her *mestiza* Virgin depicted in *Maternidad* (fig. 3.1), with her halo of light and Virginal veil, reinforces the notions of the sacredness of the role of motherhood and the centrality of procreation to the prosperity of the nation. At the same time, however, something about this Madonna belies the usual interpretations. The intensity of the sitter's gaze, as is true of many of Izquierdo's subjects, is striking. Her dark eyes are set upon an unknown point in the distance – not cast downward like the humble Guadalupana, not up towards the heavens, not at her child, and not directly engaging the viewer – and her steady, stoic expression betrays no signs of emotion, neither sorrow nor joy.

Izquierdo's abundant images of the Virgin Mary, as well as several images of Eve, make apparent a fundamental problem with the representation of the woman in modern Mexican art. Within the parameters of a Christian society and a masculinist national narrative, there was no "conceptual architecture," to quote Marina Warner, "for a single woman who is neither a virgin nor a whore."[22] The dichotomy of the good woman/bad woman was cemented in Mexico's religious and national myths and was fixed in the cultural imagination; Izquierdo could subtly undermine these myths, but their foundations were difficult to shake. Women in Mexico, as in most cultures, repeatedly were defined by "these overdetermined and conflicted constructions of femininity."[23] It is important to remember that Izquierdo, as bold and progressive a thinker that she was, was likewise socialized into these conflicted identity constructions.

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[22] Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976), 235.

Feminine identity in Mexico was both tightly and broadly bound to the notion of maternity. For women like the Chilean poet Gabriela Mistral, who was charged with taking part in the reform of public education for women in Mexico in the 1920s, maternity provided a "socially encoded metaphor for exploring aspects of feminine identity, for expressing women's relationships with the past, with children, with one another and with the physical world."[24] Statements that Izquierdo made throughout her career promoted a vision of femininity that both availed the new freedoms open to the modern woman and still highly valued her traditional familial role. She declared in a 1939 radio address, "The authentic woman is, above all, profoundly feminine, and with this, spiritual, self-sacrificing and humane. Her ethics are clean, and she is happy to be a mother, because she has in herself a creative force."[25] The construct of motherhood was an organizing principle in Izquierdo's perceptions of creativity, artistic and otherwise. Even Izquierdo's self-identification as an artist was imbued with a maternal slant; she attested that "as a painter and as a woman I have only one purpose, to give to my people, whom I love sincerely."[26] Her rhetoric, connecting womanhood, motherhood, and creativity, reveals the way that Izquierdo wanted to be perceived as a public figure even more than it illuminates meaning in her paintings. By engaging a notion of maternity so imbedded in Mexican culture, she perpetuated the idea of her own authenticity as a Mexican woman and as a professional Mexican painter.

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[23] Hershfield, *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Women*, 13.

[24] Elizabeth Horan, *Gabriela Mistral: An Artist and Her People* (Washington DC: Interamer 33 Cultural Series, OAS, 1994), 109.

[25] "La mujer auténtica, es ante todo profundamente femenina, y con esto, espiritual, abnegada y humana, su moral es limpia, es feliz de ser madre, porque tiene en sí fuerza creadora…" Radio broadcast conference dictated by María Izquierdo, "La mujer y el arte mexicano," July 1939. Copy of the transcription located the artist's file at the Biblioteca de las Artes, El Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información de Artes Plásticas (CENIDIAP) of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA), Mexico City. Quoted in Spanish in González, 153. Tones of Izquierdo's staement reverberate in the musings of Octavio Paz on the subject of the qualities that Mexican women are expected to exhibit: '…we prefer these graces and virtues be hidden. Woman should be secretive. She should confront the world with an impassive smile. She should be "decent" in the face of erotic excitements and "long-suffering" in the face of adversity.' Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, 36.

Izquierdo's mother and child paintings, in conjunction with her public statements, articulated to her audience her connection to her children, her people, and her country. This was an astute strategy for a woman who resisted so many other societal conventions. She was divorced, she carried on significant romantic relationships out of wedlock, she was an ambitious professional in a male-dominated field, and she was very vocal about her opinions. But it was motherhood, in its physical, emotional, and social senses, that safely redeemed and re-normed Izquierdo, keeping her a part of the status quo, rather than a complete outsider or a fallen woman.[27] As much as Izquierdo eschewed so many outmoded gender barriers, her experience of maternity secured her position in the symbolic, patriarchal order, an order in which Izquierdo needed to equally participate if ever she was to redefine it. In an era of anxiety over the changing roles of women, she needed to straddle both spheres.[28]

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[26] "…como pintora y como mujer tengo un solo propósito, darle a mi pueblo, que amo sinceramente..." "María Izquierdo, Víctima del Monopolio Muralista," *Excelsior,* 19 February 1952. Located in Volume 3 of the artist's file in the Biblioteca de las Artes, CENIDIAP, INBA, Mexico City.

[27] See Coffey, 207-208.

THE IMAGE OF THE MOTHER/VIRGIN IN MODERN MEXICAN ART

In a culturally Catholic country that privileged the role of motherhood, it is no accident that the Virgin Mary, the archetype of motherhood and a central component of Mexican social ideology, has been a ubiquitous image in Mexican culture and art for centuries. For Izquierdo and for other modern Mexican painters who wanted to create popular art concerned with the life of the Mexican people, the representation of the Mother/Virgin became a pervasive motif, reinterpreted to satisfy the socio-artistic goals of the era. While modern painters were often disconnected from the religiosity of the Virgin Mary, her image and her import were fertile ground for explorations of ethnicity, class concerns, gender identity, nationalism, and the figure's longstanding impact on the people of Mexico.[29]

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[28] Many scholars have discussed the complex meaning of motherhood in the social order, particularly as it related to the work and life of Frida Kahlo; as a woman who was unable carry a child to term, motherhood was one of many categories in which Kahlo did not fulfill conventional feminine expectations. See Tace Hedrick's chapter "Childless Mothers" in Tace Hedrick, *Mestizo Modernism: Race, Nation, and Identity in Latin American Culture, 1900-1940* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003). The topic is also addressed in Margaret A. Lindauer, *Devouring Frida: The Art History and Popular Celebrity of Frida Kahlo* (CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1999), 22-25.

[29] For a consideration of depictions of motherhood in Mexican art, see Dina Comisarenco's dissertation "Representations of Motherhood in Twentieth Century Mexican Painting." Ph.D. diss., Rutgers University, 1997.

Like her paintings of domestic altars, Izquierdo's mother and child paintings are firmly rooted in Mexican artistic traditions. After the Revolution, particularly in the late 1920s, and through the 1930s and 1940s, Mexican artists viewed artistic production of the viceregal epoch as an expression of Mexican culture during its formative period.[30] The arrangement of the figures in many of Izquierdo's Mother and Child paintings recall colonial *retablo* depictions of *Nuestra Señora, Refugio de Pecadores (Our Lady, Refuge of Sinners)* (fig. 3.9).[31] Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century *retablo* devotional images depicting the baby Jesus with his mother are quite consistent compositionally. Christ is generally depicted standing on Mary's lap, grasping Mary's right-hand thumb with his left hand, and usually covered by a transparent white lace tunic. Mary is dressed in a red gown and cloaked with a blue mantle, decorated with gold monograms standing for Jesus and herself. She wears a scarf around her neck and is adorned with rings, earrings, and necklaces, as are appropriate for an upper-class woman. Both Mary's and Christ's eyes make contact with the faithful viewer of the *retablo*.[32]

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[30] Clara Bargellini, "Representations of Conversion: Sixteenth Century Architecture in New Spain," in *The Word Made Image: Religion, Art, and Architecture in Spain and Spanish America, 1500-1600* (Boston: Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, 1998), 92.

[31] María Castro-Sethness notes the verisimilitude of Izquierdo's *Invierno* and the *Refugio del Pecadores retablo* imagery, and notes that "Several modern Mexican painters, in their rejection of the centralized academicism perpetuated since the Spanish Conquest, admired both the spirituality of these religious paintings as well as their expressions of freedom and self-determination." María Castro-Sethness, "Frida Kahlo's Spiritual World: The Influence of Mexican Retablo and Ex-Voto Paintings on Her Art," *Woman's Art Journal* 25, no. 2 (2004/2005): 21.

[32] The icon of the *Refugio del Pecadores* was introduced to New Spain and spread by Franciscan missionaries, becoming an extremely popular devotional image. For an examination of the *Refugio del Pecadores retablo* imagery in its colonial context, see Elizabeth N. C. Zarur, "Introduction," in *Art and Faith in Mexico: The Nineteenth*

The *Refugio del Pecadores* appears to be a prototype for at least one of Izquierdo's mother and child compositions. In *Invierno (Winter)* of 1943 (fig. 3.10), Izquierdo appropriates the compositional standard of the half-length figure of the Virgin with the child standing in her lap.[33] Izquierdo invokes the devotional intensity of its colonial predecessor, as both mother and child gaze directly at their devotee. Dense, fluffy clouds, suggestive of colonial Madonna in Gloria iconography, fill the sky and implausibly billow into the foreground of the image below the child's feet, giving the painting a sense of otherworldliness. But Izquierdo regrounds the figures in the present by stripping them of the orthodox religious and upper-class trappings of many colonial era representations. Her Madonnas wear no jewelry, and they are draped in simple, though vibrant, robes. Izquierdo most often represents her Madonnas as racially *mestiza*, a further revision of the colonial, European-derived model of a white, blonde Virgin Mary.[34] The material modesty and racial make-up of Izquierdo's Madonnas are consistent with other Mexican School representations, extracting the Madonna from its institutional, devotional sources and drawing her in closer likeness to an idea of the average, rural, ethnic, contemporary Mexican mother. The temporal connection between the past and the present achieved in Izquierdo's Madonna paintings firmly situate the artwork in the

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Century Retablo Tradition, eds. Elizabeth N.C. Zarur and Charles Muir Lovell (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2001), 21.

[33] This painting was part of a series of mother and child paintings dedicated to the four seasons.

[34] The *mestiza* representation of the Virgin also reflected the rhetoric of the post-Revolutionary period, encouraging the Indian population to see themselves as part of one Mexican identity, the *indio* and the *criollo* merged into the *mestizo*. Hershfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna*, 138.

modern day, but also hark back to Mexico's colonial period of nation formation. In so doing, and similar to the effect achieved in Revueltas's National Preparatory School mural, Izquierdo illuminates women's responsibility in the literal procreation of the Mexican nation. She clearly aligns her subject and her artwork with national and ethnic markers of Mexican-ness.

Izquierdo's Madonna imagery tied not only to religious and political ideas but also to allegorical symbols of fecundity and cycles of life. *Invierno*, titled not after its maternal subject but after a season, was part of series of motherhood paintings, each titled after a season of the year. In *Primavera* (*Spring*) of the 1943 (fig. 3.11), a Madonna figure, draped in robes, holds her infant child. The child cups the mother's chin with his hand, a common attribute in devotional Madonna imagery; in the child's other hand, a long stem with buds and fresh blooms symbolizes the season of rebirth after which the painting is named.

The most curious aspect of *Primavera* is the unnatural golden ochre skin tone in which the mother is depicted, particularly as it contrasts with the warm, rosy skin tone of her child. The Madonna's skin tone differs from those of other portraits that Izquierdo painted in the 1940s, which gravitated to a more naturalistic, and perhaps homogenized, *mestiza* tone of skin color. The subjects of *Primavera*, in fact, bear similarity to the figures depicted in Izquierdo's watercolors and gouache paintings of the 1930s, such as *Consolación (Consolation)*, 1933 (fig. 1.4). *Consolación*, an enigmatic and vaguely religious scenario, features two women, one rendered with yellow skin and the other with reddish-brown. Izquierdo's intentions behind these varied and exaggerated skin tones remain unclear. Some scholars believe that these ocher, red, and brown skin tones are meant to indicate Indian heritage, while Adriana Zavala argues instead that "by differentiating the skin tones of women in many of her watercolors, she seems to subvert the effort to collapse Mexico's racial diversity behind either *mestizaje*, the notion of racial fusion, or the concept of *indigenismo*."[35] Zavala's hypothesis is consistent with Karen Cordero Reiman's analysis of Rufino Tamayo's work during these same years in the early 1930s, whereby "Tamayo seems to play deliberately with different racial characteristics and skin colors" in order to demonstrate Mexico's ethnic diversity and as a means of problematizing the rhetoric of *mexicanidad* and racial unity of the post-Revolutionary period.[36]

If conclusions drawn about Izquierdo's subversion of assumptions of racial identity in the 1930s can be applied to her work of the 1940s, then *Primavera* merits renewed consideration. In *Primavera*, Mexico's varied ethnic genealogy is played out in the mother-child relationship, which emphasizes literally the notion of bloodlines. Juxtaposing in this painting yellow skin, red skin, and green eyes (an uncommon Mexican characteristic, perhaps indicative of European heritage), Izquierdo embraces the reality of racial mixing but resists the notion of Mexican racial fusion.

However, it is important to note that in the decade of the 1940s Izquierdo employed this specific vehicle of racial exploration only in the 1943 *Primavera*. Nonetheless, aspects of identity – ethnic, nationalist, gender, religious, cultural, etc. –

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[35] Adriana Zavala, "The Big Three: María Izquierdo," in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, eds. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 76.

[36] Karen Cordero Reiman, "Appropriation, Invention, and Irony: Tamayo's Early Period, 1920-1937," in *Tamayo: Modern Icon Reinterpreted* (California: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 2007), 174.

were central to Izquierdo's work of this decade. Further, as a self-portrait of the artist – indicated by the curvature of full, brightly painted red lips, Izquierdo's signature feature and which will be seen in many more paintings cited in this chapter – the artifices of the yellow skin tone, the green eyes, and the cloaked robes posture the artist as Indian, as European, as mother, and as Virgin, and bring to light the performative nature of social identities.

With her associations to fecundity, nurturing, and protection, Woman has long stood as the allegorical symbol of the nation, the motherland, in Western civilization. After the Mexican Revolution, the symbol of the universal mother was further constructed to convey multiple messages across a variety of sectors of the country's ideologically splintered population. Ethnic, pious, and feminine, the Virgin Mother blurred the lines between the identity of woman and the identity of nation.

For artists of the Mexican School, the visual link between the Madonna and the rural, peasant mother could be achieved through a simple element: the veil. Through the motif of the *rebozo* draped over the peasant woman's head, modern artists intentionally muddled and conflated the rural Mexican woman with Virgin Mary imagery and meaning. That is to say, through the *rebozo*, a female figure can perform multiple identities at once. As such, the revised religious Madonna icon was a potent sociopolitical vehicle.

Izquierdo adeptly used the *rebozo* motif to blur the lines between the Virgin, the Mexican woman, and the rural peasantry, as seen in *Maternidad* (fig. 3.1) and several other portraits. Indeed, there is little that distinguishes the rural woman in her *Mujer mexicana (Mexican Woman)* of 1943 (fig. 3.12) from Izquierdo's formal Madonna figures. In this painting, Izquierdo seized the iconic legibility of the modern Mexican Madonna, manipulated its symbolism, and challenged even her own depictions of maternity. The rural setting of *Mujer mexicana* is indicated by a backdrop of earthy tones and modest structures, including, on the right hand side of the composition, a building that resembles the site of mourning pictured in *Calvario* from 1933 (fig. 1.9). A white *rebozo* is loosely draped over the woman's head, and like other devotional images, her large brown eyes lock the gaze of the viewer. The woman's arms are crossed over her torso, her right arm resting atop the left and both palms turned upright, as though she could be cradling an infant. Alas, there is no infant in her ready arms, and the soil bears no vegetation; this portrait of the revised Mexican Madonna is a study of barrenness. The scene is likewise bereft of consolation, as the mausoleum structure, here unoccupied by sympathizers, is blocked from the woman by an imposing brick wall. The signs and symbols employed by Izquierdo are all empty shells, each lacking an essential component, demonstrating the solitude of living outside the parameters of societal convention. *Mujer mexicana* penetrates the surface appearances of essentialized scenes of rural femininity to convey more complicated aspects of Mexican womanhood.

Economic pressures abounded for many Mexicans, even more so for women, who had even less social power. The acute struggles of the proletarian class were a major concern for many post-Revolutionary artists, and for highly political artists like David Alfaro Siqueiros, a lifelong preoccupation. Siqueiros capitalized on the power of the image of the Mexican woman draped with a *rebozo* in *Madre campesina (Peasant Mother)*, c. 1931 (fig. 3.13) and *Madre proletaria (Proletarian Mother)* of 1931 (fig. 3.14), two of the most memorable images of motherhood produced in post-Revolutionary

Mexico. The poverty and desperation conveyed by Siqueiros's mothers is frontal. Physically constricted and suffocated by their surroundings – the peasant woman by encroaching stalks of corn, and the proletarian woman by a narrow cinderblock cell – Siqueiros presents the struggle of Mexico's poor and downtrodden via the overt depiction of the helplessness of the nation's impoverished, Indian mother with no choices and no means.[37] The composition's direct relationship to Madonna and Child imagery seals the connections between woman and Virgin, and between race, class, and religion.

Izquierdo tackled the same subject in *Madre proletaria* (*Proletarian Mother*) in 1944 (fig. 3.15). Though motherhood was a persistent theme in her work of the 1940s, the overtly political reference to this woman's class is rather atypical. Though Izquierdo pursued themes – pertaining to gender, religion, and nationalism, in particular – with political ramifications, she did not gravitate to subjects that actively engaged the revolutionary agenda.[38] However, as Robin Greeley points out, as the socialist aims of the

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[37] See Dawn Ades, "Indigenism and Social Realism," in *Art in Latin America: The Modern Era, 1820-1980* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 195; and David Craven and Luis-Martín Lozano, *Mexican Modern: Masters of the 20th Century* (Santa Fe: Museum of New Mexico Press, 2006), 31. Tace Hedrick describes the gendered and racial double standards that posed harsh consequences for the perception of Indians and women: "Latin American Indians… were still imagined as situated in a past which itself could be used for nationalistic purposes, yet their undeniable presence in the present meant that the character of the contemporary Indian was hung over, immobile, and even decadent. For the Indian man, this amounted to social death. For women, on the other hand, the supposed Indian nostalgia and passivity dovetailed nicely with imagings of the maternal as a passive, timeless, and originary source from which both nation and individual could draw strength and creativity; thus, there was continued emphasis on the importance of the maternal to the nation and, most importantly, on the image of the Indian mother as origin of racial and national energies." Hedrick, 16.

[38] A notable exception lies in a poster that Izquierdo illustrated in 1934 entitled *Proletario, destruye a tus enemigos de clase* (*Proletarian: Destroy Your Class Enemy*). She was a member of the women's section of the Union de Artes Plásticas del Departamento de Bellas Artes de la Secretaría de Educación Publica (Secretary of

Revolution waned after 1940, bourgeois audiences turned to "an art that was 'nationalist' while carrying no overt social messages, and which called for an 'educated' sensibility and nuanced readings inappropriate to the earlier years of the revolution."[39] The visual lexicon of the 1920s could be appropriated and adapted to the new socioeconomic realities of the 1940s.

Izquierdo's *Madre proletaria*, once again resembling the artist, sits on the floor, holding her toddler in her lap. She looks resigned and depressed, with her arm propped on a chair and head resting on it. She stares blankly at her pet dog, curled up with a similar demeanor. The daughter sits behind the mother, fingering a piece of string. The sleeve of her dress betrays a few tears, the only clear material evidence of financial hardship of this proletarian family. While the two children stare out at the viewer, the mother is consumed in her own thoughts. The sadness in her expression is reminiscent of the *Mater Dolorosas* that inhabit Izquierdo's domestic altars. The absence of the father from this family is evident, suggested by the empty chair that the woman leans on.
The depiction of the mother differs significantly from Izquierdo's Mexican Madonnas, as it does from Siqueiros's interpretation of the theme. There are no virginal deceits, nor is there any reference to the rural that is implicit in many of Izquierdo's maternity paintings. The interior setting is non-descript, and without any regional cues, this family is as likely

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Education Fine Arts Department's Visual Arts Union) and the poster was part of an exhibition of propagandist art. Few overtly political examples like this one, however, turn up in Izquierdo's oeurve. See Lozano, "Regarding Modern Mexican Painting: María Izquierdo (1902-1955)," in *María Izquierdo, 1902-1955* (Chicago: Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, 1996), 47.

[39] Robin Adèle Greeley. "Painting Mexican Identities: Nationalism and Gender in the Work of María Izquierdo," *Oxford Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2000): 65.

from the provinces as they are from an urban center. As rural migration to cities increased, and as more women were entering the workforce, Izquierdo's painting betrays the continued, and now changing, struggles for women.

The rapid growth of industrialization in Mexico in the modern era created new economic opportunities; "for women, this meant a greater role in production, although in the worst paying jobs."[40] Further, as a new proletarian class emerged to fuel the industrialization process, revised notions of gendered social positions were required.[41] Anxieties about the changing roles of women were high, and there came from both society and state a continued emphasis on the imperative of good motherhood. Izquierdo had been no stranger to the demands of building a professional career and managing her duties as a mother. She made a lot of accommodations to juggle both realms – arranging to paint at home while attending ENBA; creating studio space in an apartment with Tamayo where her children could be with her; sharing her apartment with Lola Álvarez Bravo after her divorce in order to share in the responsibilities of care of their kids – all very creative solutions, and none of them easy.

Izquierdo's daughter Aurora spoke to a newspaper reporter about her mother's work, and about a proletarian mother subject that she painted before or around her 1944 trip to South America:

> I believe her paintings reflect her personal dramatic quality… I remember one day when I was sick, she painted a "proletarian mother"; upon finishing the picture, she showed it to me and in it her state of mind was very visible. To me, it was a "proletarian mother" with the sadness of my

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[40] Julia Tuñón Pablos, *Women in Mexico: A Past Unveiled*, trans. Alan Hynds (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 104.

[41] Hershfield, *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Women, 1940-1950*, 28.

> mother. She still had talked about this in a letter, during her trip to …
> South America.[42]

Izquierdo's connection to her subject was both personal and broadly applicable, particularly in a moment in history when women were more publicly pulled between traditional mores and roles outside the home. *Madre proletaria* effectively portrays the struggles the modern woman faced in a web of economic struggle, menial labor, and managing the home.

LOOK AT ME NOW: THE POWER OF THE PORTRAIT

As an examination of many of Izquierdo's motherhood paintings has revealed, Izquierdo's Virgins are also self-portraits, as they all bear some resemblance to the artist, particularly in their curved lips, strong jaw, and deep-set eyes. In so doing, Izquierdo participated in a long history of self-portraiture in Western art. The genre arose in the Renaissance, and artists employed the format to assert individualism, authorship, and their aspirations of social status. Moreover, Izquierdo joins the ranks of women artists who have seized the power of self-imaging, albeit with more complicated results than their male peers. In the tradition of fine arts, portraiture, along with genre, landscape, and still life, was relegated to a minor status; appropriate to their low expectations of quality, portraiture was deemed better suited as a subject for women who insisted on taking up painting.[43] On the other hand, the portrait also provided a site in which the power of self-representation is harnessed. In an arena in which men long dominated the field, and in which women were merely models and muses to be gazed upon, women artists' representations of women and of their own bodies reassign command over the gaze and subsequent representation. Indeed, when considered in sum, the portraits, cabinets, altars, and still lifes that characterize Izquierdo's oeuvre in the 1940s appear to be a collective and powerful appropriation of the academy's minor genres. Izquierdo recasts these subordinated genres into poignant conveyers of national and gender identity.

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[42] "Yo creo que sus pinturas reflectan su dramatismo personal… Recuerdo que un día cuando estaba enferma yo, pintó una 'madre proletaria'; al terminar el cuadro, me lo llevó a enseñar y en la pintura estaba muy visible su estado de ánimo. Para mí fué una 'madre proletaria' con la tristeza de mi madre. Todavía le hablaba de esto en una carta, durante su viaje a… A ella le emociona mucho el viaje a Sudamérica." The article from which this quote was drawn, clipped and kept in the artist's file at the Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información de Artes Plásticas (INBA, Mexico City; in Volume 6 of the artist's *carpeta*), does not include a date, but given the language of the article, the interview seems to have been conducted during Izquierdo's lifetime. It is not clear that the proletarian mother subject to which Aurora refers is the same as the *Madre proletaria* referenced in this chapter, but it seems likely that they are one in the same. Victor Alba, "Trabajadora Inscansable, Madre Amorosa, Regañona y Polvorilla: Tal Es el Retrato que Pintan de su Madre las hijas de María Izquierdo," *Hoy*, 25.

There is an explicit power in appropriating such a recognizable Christian figure to depict oneself. Several masters of Western art have boldly assumed the image of biblical figures, among them, Dürer, Michelangelo, Caravaggio, Zurbarán, and Gauguin. A close contemporary of Izquierdo's, Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, also utilized this motif. In *La Piedad en el desierto (Piety in the Desert)* (1942) (fig. 3.16), the Mother Mary holds up the limp, lifeless body of her son; Rodríguez Lozano renders Christ in his own image. The fresco painting was executed and installed in the Lecumberri Prison, where he was currently serving time on what seem to be trumped-up charges.[44] Rodríguez Lozano, like Izquierdo, did not share in the dominant heterosexual-masculine identity of most of his peers. He was, rather, a homosexual man in a homophobic society,[45] and choosing to depict himself as the example of a persecuted man at the hands of his own people – while serving prison time for a crime he likely did not commit, no less – makes a provocative statement.

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[43] Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists? (1971)" in *Women, Art, and Power: and other essays*, 160. Many scholars have provided a critical perspective on the history of women in art and women's self-portraiture, including Linda Nochlin, Anne Higonnet, Norma Broude, Whitney Chadwick, and others.

While, on the surface, Izquierdo's depictions of Madonnas and mothers appear consistent with the conservative rhetoric of the day – that is, privileging the role of motherhood as something primary and sacred – *Madona roja (Red Madonna)* of 1944 (fig. 3.17), a self-portrait, openly contorts conventional depictions of the Virgin, of the woman, and of the *mestiza*. Parting ways with the humble, frail archetype instilled by the church, the *Madona roja*, this time depicted without child, pushes away with one arm the curtain of her *rebozo* as she intently stares into the distance. Izquierdo overemphasizes certain features of the face – the curl of her upper lip; the dark shading that denotes an upturned chin and articulates a thick, muscular bicep – challenges conventional representations of feminine beauty and accentuates the strength of mind and body. Even for all of the painting's Mexicanist signs – from the very subject matter of an ethnic

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[44] Manuel Rodríguez Lozano was accused of stealing valuable prints by Guido Reni and Albrecht Dürer from the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas, where he was the director. See the informative biography and analysis of *Piedad en el desierto* and other works by Beatriz Zamora Navarro, *Manuel Rodríguez Lozano o la revelación ideal de Narciso* (Mexico: INBA, CONACULTA, 2002), 61-67.

[45] There are comprehensive studies of constructions of masculinity in Mexican culture in film and literary studies. See, for example, Sergio de la Mora, *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006); and Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

Madonna to the golden orb, rimmed with an indigenous pattern of design, standing for both the sun and her halo – classic constructions of *mestiza* identity are subtly undermined. The drawn-back *rebozo* reveals Izquierdo's long hair, cascading down her chest in waves; the braids that normally correspond to customary Indian style are now undone. The figure literally appears to be emerging from the constraints of religious, gender, and *mestiza* identities.

In *Madona roja*, Izquierdo revises the ideal construct of the Mexican woman, portraying a figure who is foremost sturdy, resolute, and powerful, subverting the usual religious and nationalistic expressions that propagate gender oppression. She underlines the boldness and inner fire of the subject with the prominent use of the color red. The sheath of fabric cloaking this *Red Madonna* sets off her red lipstick, another indication of the New Woman and a distinct characteristic of Izquierdo's own style. "María Izquierdo put her face and the curvature of her lips on all of her Virgins," writes Elena Poniatowska. "They are all curvy, tough, unavoidable. A sort of contained rage reflects their inner life."[46] In giving her own physical – and ideological – likeness to the Madonna icon, Izquierdo reframes the meaning of this canonical figure, imparting a sense of personal agency and power otherwise bereft in institutional representations. And in taking on the character of the Virgin Mary, Mexico's most revered and popular woman by any measure, Izquierdo elevates herself, a female artist positioning herself in the public eye and in a competitive profession, to icon status. Further, through her *mestiza* Madonnas,

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[46] "A todas las vírgenes María Izquierdo les pone su cara y la curvatura de sus labios. Todas son rotundas, duras, inevitables. Una suerte de rabia contenida refleja su vida interior." Elena Poniatowska, *Las siete cabritas* (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 2000), 88.

Izquierdo seamlessly bonds her persona – and her very person – to evolving notions of religion, womanhood, Mexican-ness, and greatness.

Izquierdo's female portraits are simultaneously infused with traditional ideals and a modern sensibility. In an *Untitled* maternity self-portrait from 1944 (fig. 3.18), the portrayal of the female figure in some ways mimics traditional imagery of the church; cradling her child in her arms, with her gently tilted head and softly fixed gaze, motherhood is rendered as a sacred act. At the same time, this mother appears powerful and sensuous, accentuated by the fiery red *rebozo* that envelops her.[47] Typical of Izquierdo's representations of women, the mother figure embodies dual qualities of tradition and modern-ness; chastity and fecundity; softness and assertiveness.

CONFLUENCE: IZQUIERDO AND KAHLO

From Mexican mothers to Virgin Marys, from self-portraits to portraits of friends and patrons, and from lone figures to family groupings, Izquierdo painted countless pictures of women in the decade of the 1940s. Beyond her mission to picture Mexican women in the nation's visual arts, Izquierdo also sought to codify the position of one particular woman – herself – into the ranks of Mexico's finest artists and cultural public figures. Through her multiple self-portraits and portraits bearing a resemblance to the artist, Izquierdo calls on associations to the universal mother, ethnic identity, and religious iconography, and thereby demonstrates her ambition to figure herself publicly as synonymous with Mexican culture itself. These paintings firmly situate Izquierdo's work in the ideology of the Mexican School, concerned with the popular, the rural, the ethnic, religious history, and the everyday life of Mexican people. As a woman, she also needed to establish her validity as an artist in a masculinist modern art world. To this end, the self-portrait was an important vehicle for Izquierdo's codification of her professional status and her authenticity as Mexican and as modern.

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[47] Celeste Donovan, "*Maternidad*, 1944, María Izquierdo," in *Christie's, New York, Latin American Sale Catalogue*, 17-18 November 2010, 16.

No discussion of women's self-portraiture in Mexico in the modern era is complete without mention of Frida Kahlo. She was first introduced to the public as Diego Rivera's wife and was notorious for her flamboyant adoption of the dress of Mexico's indigenous women. Kahlo began painting in the late 1920s, and over the entirety of her career painted an extraordinary number of self-portraits that acted as a potent vehicle for expressing and exploring identities ranging from gender, Mexican-ness, physical disability, and matrimony. With common friends in a relatively small professional community, Izquierdo certainly knew Kahlo and likely her paintings as well. Both women were also simultaneously employed as teachers at La Esmeralda art school in 1942. The bond between them, however, must not be overstated; there is no evidence to suggest that the two were close friends, nor is their artistic output particularly similar.[48] At the same time, there are certain commonalities as women artists in this era that are useful to analyze, particularly as they relate to each artist's employment of self-portraiture.

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[48] Octavio Paz, "María Izquierdo, Seen in Her Surroundings and Set in Her Proper Place," in *Essays on Mexican Art* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993), 260.

Just as the 1940s marked a significant shift in Izquierdo's career, the same was true for Frida Kahlo. As much impact as the legacy of Kahlo and her paintings have today, in fact, her public recognition as an artist in her own right did not fully emerge until the 1940s.[49] When Kahlo, already an internationally established public figure as Diego Rivera's wife, garnered fame as a painter, Izquierdo was forced to share the small stage of professionally acclaimed Mexican women artists. Kahlo's new layer of fame did not cast a shadow over Izquierdo to the extent that history has since done so, but, surely, it did change the playing field.

With Kahlo's rising fame, she gravitated toward the bust-length portrait format, and produced an increasing number of self-portraits in order "to assert her seriousness as an artist."[50] Izquierdo also produced a high volume of bust-length portraits in the 1940s. This is a notable shift from her body of work of the 1930s, in which Izquierdo "resisted the overtly self-referential use of the body typical of Kahlo,"[51] and instead used female nudes as allegorical symbols and actors in elusive scenes of despair. Her adoption of the classic bust portrait composition in the 1940s refocused her subject matter from women to Woman, and, at that, to one woman in particular: herself. Kahlo's increasing professional success in this decade, which was in large part built upon her self-portraiture, may have encouraged – perhaps even forced – Izquierdo to employ the strategies of self-portraiture, for both its expressive and promotional potential, at a moment when she was trying to maintain and to grow her position in Mexico's cohort of nationally celebrated artists.

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[49] See Hayden Herrera's chapter "Patrons, Politics, Public Recognition" for a thorough overview of the rise of Kahlo's recognition as an artist in her own right. Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), 316-343.

[50] Gannit Ankori, *Imaging Her Selves: Frida Kahlo's Poetics of Identity and Fragmentation* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002), 185. Ankori is quoted in an unpublished manuscript by Anna Indych-López, analyzing Kahlo's "*Self-Portrait with Braid*, 1941." Hayden Herrera notes that Kahlo's focus on producing bust-length portraits began after 1940. Hererra, 311.

[51] Adriana Zavala, "The Big Three: María Izquierdo," 77.

The challenge for Izquierdo, and for any artist, was to experiment in self-portraiture concurrent to Kahlo while developing her own unique take on the genre. Although Izquierdo's painting on the whole did not emulate that of Kahlo, some of her early self-portraits, around the year 1940, corroborate the influence of Kahlo's project on Izquierdo. *Mujer oaxaqueña (Oaxacan Woman)* of 1940 (fig. 3.19) portrays Izquierdo in a reddish-orange *huipíl*, a style of dress patterned from a rectangular cotton cloth typical of the region, and also very much a signature look for Kahlo. Her hair is drawn up in braids and tied with a purple bow. The depth of the painting is shallow, as the background is thick with lush, green vegetation. The composition – the bust portrait in quarter profile, clothing, styling, and flora – is very similar to several canvases painted by Kahlo around this time, such as her *Autorretrato con mono (Self-Portrait with Monkey)* of 1940 (fig. 3.20). Izquierdo also utilized the backdrop of lush flora in *Mis Sobrinas (My Nieces)* in 1940 (fig. 1.21). Though this motif might equally be owed to French painter Henri Rousseau's jungle paintings, which she very much admired,[52] the connection to Kahlo's work at this moment is uncanny. Apparently cognizant of the relationship to Kahlo's portraiture around this same time, Izquierdo largely moved away from the flora motif after 1940, and the cloudy skies and stark interiors that often set the backdrop of her portraits became more characteristic of her work. Izquierdo developed the aesthetic of her self-portraiture in another direction while she still, like Kahlo, explored aspects of femininity, national authenticity, and other themes.

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[52] Cristina La Porta, "María Izquierdo: The Artist as Image," *American Arts Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (Winter 2008): 10.

By 1943, Izquierdo's trademark portraiture style took firm hold; in this year, she began to produce numerous Virgin Mary-related self-portraits, from her home altar series to her Mexican Madonnas, as well as images of women (often resembling herself) transformed into rural, virtuous archetypes by the device of the *rebozo* draped like a veil over the head. In a 1944 self-portrait, the artist pictured herself with a simple white sheath cloaked over her head (fig. 3.21). As a bust-portrait, the composition is remarkably simple, but charged with meaning. Dramatic plays of light against dark energize the canvas; darkly shadowed creases in the draped cloth are repeated in the shadowed contours of the sitter's face. The creased brow and lines around the eyes reveal the artist's age – Izquierdo was forty-two years old when this portrait was painted – but in the context of the self-portrait these signs of aging challenge conventional notions of idealized beauty and also speak to her experience and longevity in the field of painting.[53] Her upper torso is angled to the left, but her head turns to meet the gaze of the viewer with bright, penetrating brown eyes. Her red painted lips compliment the deep red background, the richness of these colors are set off by the stark white fabric draped over her head; further, the traditional, rural *rebozo* contrasts with the make-up of the New Woman who wears it. The juxtaposition of the two devices – the lipstick and the *rebozo* –

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[53] In an unpublished manuscript analyzing Kahlo's "*Self-Portrait with Braid*, 1941," Anna Indych-López discusses Kahlo's painting in the context of Kahlo coming to terms with her aging on the occasion of her fortieth birthday. This perspective informs my analysis of Izquierdo's painting when she is around the same age.

call attention to constructed nature of Izquierdo's multiple Mexican identities, and the ways in which these accessories proffer to the artist simultaneous states of modernity, femininity, religion, race, and the rural.

Izquierdo and Kahlo both possessed a striking physical presence, and each were willing, even proud, to accentuate their somewhat masculine features in their artwork; Kahlo's single eyebrow is a trademark of her self-imaging, and Izquierdo's strong jaw and tough upper lip are exaggerated in many of her paintings. Izquierdo's self-portrait of 1943 (fig. 3.22), this time stripped of any specifically Mexican ephemera, displays the artist's sensuality, strength, and intellectual intensity. It is a handsome beauty that Izquierdo puts forth, rather than idealizing more socially endorsed notions of feminine beauty propagated in the women's magazines, cinema, and other media outlets that grew exponentially in the modern era.

Traditional Mexican clothing was an important element to each artist's professional status and public reputation. While Izquierdo was well known to wear traditional garments before Kahlo made the look her signature, photographs of Izquierdo suggest that the indigenous style in which she presented herself in her paintings was not her daily mode of dress, at least not to the extent that it was for Kahlo. That is to say, while Kahlo actually often wore the Tehuana styles in which she pictured herself, Izquierdo, who painted her own face onto her numerous Mexican Madonnas and rural women, did not wear a *rebozo* over her head out in the world. Kahlo maintained a traditional Tehuana mode of dress, at least for the periods that she was with her husband Diego Rivera; Izquierdo, on the other hand, alternated and blended traditional Mexican and contemporary international styles, some of which appeared in her portraits, and some of which did not. Octavio Paz distinguished the styles of Izquierdo and Kahlo in this way: "María's attire was more fantastic than Frida's; by that I mean that Frida's outfits were really regional garments whereas María's were versions of popular fashions that appealed to her vanity. María's clothes, despite their hieratic style, concealed a simple, popular personality; Frida's, a complex and not at all popular personality."[54] In a 1944 self-portrait (fig. 3.23), Izquierdo portrays herself effortlessly embodying both the traditional and the modern. Her hair is drawn up on her head in cloth and braids in native style, while she wears a dress made of flower print fabric in step with mass-produced, ready-to-wear fashion. Photographs of Izquierdo included in the 1988 retrospective catalogue show the artist in ready-to-wear fashion of the day; other photographs catch her at public events in elegant evening wear; others show the manner in which Izquierdo freely mixed traditional flourishes with modern clothes (fig. 3.24).[55]

Izquierdo demonstrated many of her fashion styles in her paintings, but her more "aristocratic" side was not revealed in paint. The carefully constructed *mestiza* identity in Izquierdo's paintings of the 1940s, then, is especially poignant in a decade when it is said that Izquierdo traded her bohemian lifestyle of the 1930s for that of a high society socialite. Her manner of dress changed, from the eccentric make-up and traditional Mexican clothing to a more cultivated look, one suitable for a woman who, in the words of Elena Poniatowska, was "no longer nibbling on corn, but rather on canapés."[56] In one sense, the constructed identities in her paintings could help her maintain her aura of local traditionalism while she herself pursued a more cosmopolitan lifestyle. Each mode of dress, from traditional to cosmopolitan, allowed the artist to code-switch in order to navigate various sectors of society and her profession. Her vacillation between fashions evinced the modern notion that a woman's appearance was central to her identity, "and that identity could be changed through physical self-transformation."[57] Not always mutually exclusive, each mode of dress, traditional *mestiza* and cosmopolitan contemporary, was essential to the multifaceted assemblage of her modern Mexican feminine identity.[58]

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[54] Paz, "María Izquierdo, Seen in Her Surroundings and Set in Her Proper Place," in *Essays on Mexican Art*, 260.

[55] This is evidenced by many photos featured in the retrospective catalogue, *María Izquierdo* (1988).

Both Kahlo's and Izquierdo's outer appearances, in life and in paint, were important to her self-fabrication as a culturally relevant artist, embodying her modernity, femininity, and Mexican-ness. This is not to say that the two women were disingenuous in their adoption of native costume; quite the contrary, there is universal agreement from those who knew them that Izquierdo and Kahlo were passionate in their love of indigenous and national traditions.[59] But it is clear that each of their constructions of identities, tightly bound to Mexican traditions, was a necessary tool to access and operate in the same strata as the well-regarded, male painters of Mexico. It was crucial to both Izquierdo's and Kahlo's artistic credibility that they openly act out their cultural authenticity; theirs was an exercise in *mexicanidad* consistently performed on the site of their own bodies.

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[56] Elena Poniatowska, "María Izquierdo, On Horseback," in *The True Poetry: The Art of María Izquierdo* (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1997), 85-86.

[57] Joanne Hershfield demonstrates how this notion was evidenced in the pages of Mexican magazines and newspapers in the modern era. Hershfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna*, 45.

[58] "From the sixteenth century until the present moment, Mexican women and men have fashioned themselves national and individual identities from an assemblage of images and ideas that were and are foreign and indigenous, modern and traditional." Ibid., 6-7.

[59] The inspiration for Frida Kahlo's appropriation of regional garments was complicated by her marriage to Diego Rivera. According to Gannit Ankori, "for Kahlo these 'special'

In the modern era, dress was an important expression of artistic identity throughout the profession, even for men. At work on their murals, men, such as *Los Tres Grandes*, wore worker's coveralls that were intended to evoke the labor and physical nature of the task at hand. James Oles points out that not only the medium of the mural but also its mode of dress was perceived to be inappropriate for women, as "even in postrevolutionary Mexico women were discouraged from assuming overly public roles. Though one could become an artist or even an art dealer, it was less easy to leave home to work on the scaffolds, wearing overalls like a common worker. Women muralists, by violating expected standards of dress and adopting a public role, had a difficult struggle."[60] Male muralists' dress, encoding a Marxist connection to the worker and, by extension, to the progress of the nation, spoke to the present and future of Mexico, while

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costumes were inextricably linked with her self-perception as 'Rivera's woman.' Near the end of her life she recalled: 'In another period I dressed like a boy with shaved hair, pants, boots, and a leather jacket. But when I went to see Diego I put on a Tehuana costume.' In fact… almost every time Kahlo and Rivera split up, Kahlo took off her Tehuana costume and cut off her hair. Ironically, her unconventional persona was part and parcel of her self-image as the traditional spouse." Ankori, 144. For a vivid account of Kahlo's interest in costumes, see also Herrera, 109-113.

[60] James Oles, "Colecciones disueltas: sobre unos extranjeros y muchos cuadros mexicanos," in *Patrocinio, colección y circulación de las artes: XX Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1997), 88-89.

Izquierdo and Kahlo, as women, were socialized to maintain a physical connection to Mexico's past in order to assure their very belonging in the modern Mexicanist project.[61] The women's self-portraits, rendered with the requisite indigenous, popular, and/or colonial accoutrement, were one marker of their authenticity as truly Mexican, as truly Mexican artists, and, further, as Mexican *women* artists. The body and the painted body were sites on which they merged their own beings with Mexican identity and with Mexican art.

Critics writing about Izquierdo since the 1930s have emphasized the artist's identity as a woman of Tarascan Indian descent from the state of Jalisco, justifying what they deemed to be an innate and irrepressible Mexican character to her work. According to Carlos Monsiváis, the force of "popular vitality" in the work of Izquierdo is something instinctual and irrepressible, "because she cannot and does not want to be anything else;" she has "such overwhelming faith in the truth of her painting that she does not physically distance herself from her subjects."[62] Indeed, the emphasis on Izquierdo's indigenous authenticity was as important to her acceptance in the avant-garde in the 1930s as it was to her more mainstream recognition in the 1940s, both trends mandating populist, *mestizaje*, and nationalistic characters, both in personality and in plastic expression.

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[61] It is difficult to think of any major male artist of the time who dressed in traditional or rural clothing with any regularity. Francisco Goitia, it was noted, came from his hut in Xochimilco dressed in his peasant garb to visit Frida Kahlo on her deathbed, but Goitia, unlike most modern artists, lived a very different, outsider lifestyle as a hermit in self-imposed poverty. See Herrera, 409.

[62] "María Izquierdo, la persona y el personaje: vitalidad popular porque no puede ni quiere ser otra cosa, fe desbordada en la verdad de su pintura al punto de no distanciarse físicamente de sus temas. Y amor a la representación de una 'mexicanidad' que complementa el 'alma' de sus cuadros." Carlos Monsiváis, "María Izquierdo: La Idolatria de lo Visible," in *María Izquierdo* (México: Casa de Bolsa CREMI, 1986), 14.

Establishing her credibility in this manner was all the more important for Izquierdo as a woman artist. During these decades in Mexico, according to Tace Hedrick, "the distances between what it meant to be a woman, to be an artist, and to be mestiza were far greater than for men," and "the problems that women might have had in conceptualizing a smooth integration of all three could never be completely erased."[63] Izquierdo, persistent in her efforts to position herself in the heart of the Mexicanist project, used the self-portrait to underpin her reputation as a serious *mestiza* woman artist.

Izquierdo also drew a great deal of strength and empowerment from her performance of Mexican identity. Her self-portrait of 1946 (fig. 3.25) was painted during a time in which Izquierdo was rebounding from the disappointment of a cancelled mural commission and was embroiled in a heated public debate that threw into question her abilities as an artist, a topic that will be explored in more depth in the next chapter. Presenting herself in the costume of the authentic *mestiza* more intensely than in any other self-portrait, the painting stands as a line of defense against her critics. Laden with large pieces of local silver jewelry, the Mexican accessories take on a look of armor. Izquierdo wears her hair in native fashion, with braids drawn up on her head and wrapped with fabric in the colors of the Mexican flag. The rectangular neckline, bordered with white lace, marks a traditional style of dress; however, rather than wearing the bright, vivid colors commonly associated with native dress, Izquierdo's dress is a uniform black, the color customarily and consistently worn by women in mourning.[64] There is sternness in her facial expression, and her posture is squared and stiff, but at the same time she appears fortified and proud. By emphasizing, even exaggerating, her Mexican-ness and portraying herself as an enduring presence even in the thick of disappointment and sorrow, Izquierdo re-asserts her relevance to modern Mexican art.

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[63] Hedrick, 162.

[64] Evelyn Stevens, "Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo," in *Confronting Change, Challenging Tradition: Women in Latin American History*, ed. Gertrude M. Yeager (Jaguar Books on Latin America, no. 7. Delaware: Scholarly Resources, Inc. 1994), 9-10.

CONCLUSION

Izquierdo painted many formal self-portraits in the 1940s, yet even her pictures of average Mexican women resemble the artist in a distinct way. Overall, the portraits of the decade present a studied exploration of gendered, national, racial, religious, and modern identities. The artist's Madonna images reify notions of the sanctity of motherhood while they also subvert conventions of the imagination of women's frailty and passivity. Her self-portraits are not solely introspective examinations of her own identity; these are public documents, in which Izquierdo penetrated the layers of socially constructed notions of modernity, maternity, and Mexican-ness. Further, she harnessed the power of self-representation as a means of literally connecting herself to notions of nation, the rural, devotion, creativity and procreativity. In short, through her multiple self-portraits, Izquierdo positioned herself as synonymous with womanhood, nationhood, and Mexican culture itself.

In an artistic milieu in which the heroic masculinity of muralism still reigned strong, Izquierdo had to satisfy prevailing notions of representations of Mexican-ness while seeking alternative routes to establish her self, her art, and her name as a prominent female artist. Working in a cultural moment in which the notion of public celebrity was taking shape, her numerous self-portraits, conflated with Virgin Mary imagery, transformed Izquierdo into a virtual icon of modern art. This project was seminal to her attainment of fame and status, and would help pave the way to the most revered of all artistic endeavors: a government granted mural commission. The next chapter will chart Izquierdo’s course to this great feat.

CHAPTER FOUR

Fame, Gender, and the "Mural Scandal" In Context

Izquierdo's professional success and public celebrity blossomed in the early 1940s, transforming her from a darling of Mexico City's avant-garde to a business-savvy socialite enjoying national and international recognition. In 1945, María Izquierdo was the first Mexican woman to be granted a major government sponsored mural commission. This fact is not to be taken lightly. The triumph of modern Mexican art was one that was perceived, then and now, to take place on the public walls of Mexico. This seminal mode of art production was, in fact, dominated by "The Three Greats": Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros. The famed Mexican Mural Movement had been in swing for almost twenty-five years before a Mexican woman, finally, was granted such an important, highly visible commission.

Unfortunately, Izquierdo's commission was abruptly withdrawn not long after she began its execution at the Palacio del Departamento del Distrito Federal. Izquierdo launched a heated public campaign criticizing the revered muralists – namely, Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros – who supported her ejection from the project. The fallout that ensued from this scandal negatively affected Izquierdo's public image. She was confident that she would be able to rouse sympathy from the public and from fellow artists who, like herself, were unable to break this glass ceiling of Mexican artistic acclaim, but Izquierdo instead met a considerable lack of support from artists, critics, and journalists.

The previous chapters of this dissertation dealt with Izquierdo's evocations of the Virgin Mary, motherhood, and self-portraiture. While Izquierdo refused to label her painting as categorically political, her home altars and Madonnas encompass elements central to issues of contemporary gender politics: domestic spaces and goods; social needs and concerns about women and children; reclamation and adaptation of standardized female role models; and self-portraits of the female artist. Izquierdo was intent on claiming a space for women in Mexico's visual lexicon, and, by extension, a space of power and respect for Mexican women in the broader culture. But the claims on this space – for herself and for women in general – were not without consequences. Her pursuit of a painting career in the overwhelmingly male art realm and her active cultivation of fame and status simultaneously weave a tale of her personal negotiations with normative gender expectations and constraints.

This chapter investigates Izquierdo's concerted efforts to attain cultural prestige and celebrity and the repercussions of her professional advancement in modern Mexican art. A study of Izquierdo's pursuit of stardom reveals the seriousness with which she took herself as an artist, and it also sheds light on professional strategies she employed that influenced her output in the 1940s. Izquierdo's preparatory mural sketches, which postured women as the key players in various sectors of Mexican society, and the "mural scandal" that erupted after her dismissal illuminate the disparity between the all-inclusive rhetoric of *mexicanidad* and the dominance of men and the masculine perspective on the national narrative of the revolutionary hero. This chapter plots Izquierdo's professional ambition and management of her public image in the 1940s and illuminates the barriers of gender oppression that compromised her progress.

A RISING STAR

Twentieth century Mexico witnessed a constant shifting of ground between advancements in women's rights and backlash adherence to traditional patriarchal modes. During the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940), women continued to enter the work force and maintained efforts to achieve suffrage. Izquierdo's own professional career blossomed in these years, and by the late 1930s, she had established her public stature and presence. An outspoken woman, Izquierdo's 1939 radio address on the theme of "Women in Art" spelled out the artist's stance on women's role in the home, in society, and more specifically, reflected her own impressions of her personal progress and obstacles in the profession of art. Pre-dating Linda Nochlin's landmark essay "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" by over 30 years,[1] Izquierdo identified and responded to the cultural assumption that "women will never equal the great masters of painting," pointing to the fact that, for centuries, women have been consistently and "completely displaced from artistic and intellectual endeavors." She continued:

> We all know that only in our century has a woman begun to have the opportunity to study and work in whatever she desires; before, a woman was not permitted to do any other thing that was not cooking,

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[1] Linda Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *ArtNews* (1971) in *Women, Art, and Power: and other essays*, Linda Nochlin. (New York: Harper & Row, 1988): 145-178.

> embroidering, and caring for her husband. … Only now has the woman been given the opportunity to develop her talent; that is why it does not seem to me strange that she has not equaled the immortal masters of painting. But I believe that if a woman continues to conquer and has more liberty of expression, she will arrive at a high position in the visual arts. Why? Aren't there fine women painters emerging all over the world who have carved new paths in art? It is interesting to observe these great advances by women who for the first time occupy a useful place in the progress of civilization and in the culture of nations.[2]

Izquierdo, along with Lola Álvarez Bravo, Olga Costa, Frida Kahlo, and a handful of European and U.S. female artists working in Mexico, stood among the new generation of women emerging as recognized contributors to the field of art. Izquierdo was affiliated with Mexico's avant-garde and received encouraging critical reviews during the first decade of her career, but by 1939, she needed a more competitive strategy in order to continue to climb to "a high position in the visual arts" and secure her body of work "in the progress of civilization and in the culture of nations."[3]

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[2] "Todos sabemos que solo en nuestra siglo a la mujer se le empieza a dar oportunidad para que estudie y trabaje en lo que le guste, antes a la mujer no se le permitía hacer otra cosa que no fuera, cocinar, bordar y atender a su esposo… solamente ahora se le empieza a dar oportunidad a la mujer para que desarrolle su talento, por eso no me extraña que no haya igualado todavía a los maestros inmortales de la pintura. Pero creo, que si la mujer sigue conquistando mas y mas libertad de expresión llegará tan alto en las artes plásticas ¿por qué? No comienzan ya a surgir en todo el mundo pintoras muy buenas que hasta marcan nuevos rumbos al arte, es interesante observar estos grandes procesos en la mujer que por primera vez ocupa un lugar útil en el progreso de la civilización y la cultura de los pueblos." Radio broadcast conference dictated by María Izquierdo, "La mujer y el arte mexicano," July 1939. Copy of the transcription located the artist's file at the Biblioteca de las Artes, El Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información de Artes Plásticas (CENIDIAP) of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA), Mexico City. Quoted in Spanish and English in María de Jesus González, *The Art of Maria Izquierdo: Formative Years 1928 to 1934* (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1998), 8.

[3] Ibid.

Izquierdo delivered her speech on status of women in the arts while she herself was on the cusp of significant change in her painting.[4] While her output of the 1930s firmly situated the artist in the Mexican avant-garde, it is evident that her work of the 1940s shifted Izquierdo closer to the "mainstream" art market, as her palette grew bolder and brighter, and her commitment to producing works clearly articulating *lo mexicano* became a paramount task. At the same time, her work of this decade demonstrates a departure from the status quo, for her most prevalent subjects in this endeavor were women and popular and religious customs in which women fully and equally participate. Izquierdo's mission was to be recognized as an "immortal master of painting," and to earn this stature through a channel that her male contemporaries did not: that is, via the representation of the Mexican woman and her active cultural participation and production.

Over the course of her career, Izquierdo's prolific output of feminine subjects – such as allegorical representations of women, domestic altars, Madonna imagery, and self-portraits – were the basis for explorations of socially constructed gender identities. In the 1940s, Izquierdo was also preoccupied with the construction of her own social identity, and multiple professional activities outside of her painting reinforced both her creative endeavors and the advancement of her career. Endeavoring to achieve notoriety as a seminal artistic figure with a distinctive body of artwork, Izquierdo worked tirelessly to carve a respectable space for herself in a male dominated field.

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[4] Elizabeth Ferrer identifies this shift in her essay, "A Singular Path: The Artistic Development of María Izquierdo," in *The True Poetry: The Art of María Izquierdo* (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1997), 18.

Izquierdo has been remembered by those who knew her both for her personality and public persona as well as for the body of artwork that she left behind. Octavio Paz states that even before Frida Kahlo made the style a personal trademark, Izquierdo was known to have dressed in traditional clothing and jewelry, fashioned her hair in braids, and wore bold make up that accentuated her Tarascan Indian features.[5] Izquierdo was a popular personality in avant-garde circles in the 1930s, frequenting Mexico City's few artistic cafés and holding salons in her home. She produced works of art with a rawness, mystique, and originality that attracted the attention of French surrealist writer Antonin Artaud in 1936 and secured her inclusion as the only woman in Carlos Mérida's 1937 compendium *Modern Mexican Artists*.[6] Since the early 1930s, she garnered the attention of artists and critics, such as those linked to the avant-garde group Los Contemporáneos, who sought to develop and promote facets of modern Mexican art that did not adhere to the dominant political ideologies of the celebrated Mural Movement. While she was steadily building her critical acclaim, it was not until the 1940s that her economic success and broad public notoriety blossomed. In this decade, Izquierdo branched into new and diverse career opportunities and sustained concerted efforts of self-promotion.

Around the year 1940, Izquierdo's representation in national and international exhibitions increased in number and in importance, coinciding with a spike of interest in Mexican art in the United States and Europe. In 1939 she participated in New York's *1st International Fair* and in the *Golden Gate International Exposition* in San Francisco. Her painting *Mis sobrinas* (fig. 1.21) was included in the Museum of Modern Art's *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* in New York in 1940, and it was the first artwork purchased by the Mexican government for the proposed Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico. Three years later, her work was shown in the Philadelphia Museum of Art's exhibition *Mexican Art Today*, and she also achieved a solo exhibition in Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes. In a short period of time, Izquierdo's painting advanced from local acclaim to international exposure.

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[5] Paz, "María Izquierdo, Seen in Her Surroundings and Set in Her Proper Place," in *Essays on Mexican Art*, 260.

[6] Carlos Mérida, *Modern Mexican Artists: Critical Notes* (Mexico: Frances Toor Studios, 1937), 83-84.

Historians today concur that by 1940, with the transfer of presidential power from the liberal Lazaro Cárdenas to the conservative Manuel Ávila Camacho, the sociopolitical drive of the Revolution was effectively over. Art historians, therefore, may be inclined to see in the Mexicanist subjects painted in the decade of the 1940s a tired recycling of old tropes, out of step with the tone of the nation. This is evidenced by the way in which summaries of the period sharply end with the year 1940; works by artists active in the post-Revolutionary era, but whose careers extend into the 1940s, are consistently considered in the same analytical terms of their earlier careers. While it is true that many of the visual tropes of the previous two decades continued to be reproduced in the visual arts, this viewpoint does not fully take into account the changing contexts of their employment. As Izquierdo's work proves, the established nationalist lexicon, with some distance from the Revolution and its overt social missions, could be used to articulate more nuanced messages.[7] And while the Revolution may have decidedly ended, the nationalist project certainly had not; far from it, a concerted revival of *mexicanidad* was undertaken in this decade.

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[7] Greeley, Robin Adèle. "Painting Mexican Identities: Nationalism and Gender in the Work of María Izquierdo," *Oxford Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2000): 65.

The administration of President Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946) sanctioned a renewal of *mexicanidad* as a means of redefining and restructuring the relationship between culture and state, and reinforcing a unifying national identity.[8] Where presidents throughout the post-Revolutionary era between 1920 and 1940 supported a cultivation of *mexicanidad* in the arts to unify a people divided by civil strife, through projects such as publicly funded murals, Ávila Camacho hoped to maintain a sense of national unity in a period of rapid industrialization and internationalization. Ávila Camacho attempted to create a mass media-based cultural nationalism rooted in loyalty to Mexican personalities. He heartily promoted *mexicanidad* as a unifying national identity through the funding and support of a national film industry, a national ballet, a national symphony orchestra, art exhibits, museums, a publishing industry, and a wealth of creative citizens.[9]

With the sweeping social and economic changes ushered in with the presidential administration of Manuel Ávila Camacho, new opportunities opened up for visual artists. It was under the auspices of such government funding that Izquierdo assumed a teaching position at the Ministry of Public Education's School of Painting and Sculpture, which opened in 1942.[10] The school was renamed "La Esmeralda" by students for the street on which the school was located. The emphatically *mexicanista* philosophy of the school was in line with Izquierdo's aesthetic ideology, as "to the teachers at La Esmeralda, all of Mexico was a studio."[11] Antonio Ruiz, was named Director of the school,[12] and the staff included such prominent artists as Jesús Guerrero Galván, Carlos Orozco Romero, Agustín Lazo, Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, Francisco Zúñiga, Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo.

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[8] The surge in *mexicanidad* in the 1940s drew from the philosophy of former Secretary of Education José Vasconcelos, who served from 1921-1924. He left Mexico in exile after losing the 1929 presidential election. He became an ardent Roman Catholic and zealous apologist for Spanish tradition. He returned to Mexico in 1938. Luis A. Marentes, *José Vasconcelos and the Writing of the Mexican Revolution* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 2000), 175.

[9] Michael Nelson Miller explores the reach and scope of *avilacamachismo* in *Red, White, and Green: The Maturing of Mexicanidad, 1940-1946* (Southwestern Studies No. 107. El Paso: Texas Western Press, University of Texas, 1998), 1.

In 1944, as part of Ávila Camacho's program to promote the country's cultural mission abroad, Izquierdo was chosen to represent the nation as a cultural ambassador in South America. Her campaign in Peru and Chile was a great personal success. She was received gloriously in Santiago de Chile, where the acclaimed poet and diplomat Pablo Neruda "welcomed her as if she were an apparition."[13] Izquierdo became good friends with Neruda during his own diplomatic tenure as Consul General in Mexico City from 1940 to 1943.[14] Izquierdo gave Neruda at least two paintings, one that symbolizes his artistic accomplishes, and another that represents hers. *Tributo a Pablo Neruda (Tribute to Pablo Neruda)* (1943) (fig. 4.1) is a playful, festival-like homage to Neruda and his poetry. A second untitled maternity painting (fig. 3.18), which again figures Izquierdo in the Madonna role, was more exemplary of Izquierdo's dominant themes at this time. With this gift, Izquierdo left the Chilean dignitary with a document of an archetypal Mexican woman; as a self-portrait, she was able to merge her own persona with that cultural ideal.

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[10] Michael Nelson Miller, *Red, White, and Green: The Maturing of Mexicanidad, 1940-1946* (Southwestern Studies No. 107. El Paso: Texas Western Press, University of Texas, 1998), 159-160.

[11] Hayden Herrera, *Frida: A Biography of Frida Kahlo* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984), 328-329.

[12] In 1942, the same year as her appointment, Izquierdo wrote a very complimentary review of the work of Antonio Ruiz, perhaps to help cement her standing with the influential painter. María Izquierdo, "Antonio Ruiz," *Hoy*, 21 Nov 1942, 48-49.

[13] Elena Poniatowska, "María Izquierdo, On Horseback," in *The True Poetry: The Art of María Izquierdo* (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1997), 86.

[14] Octavio Paz, "María Izquierdo, Seen in Her Surroundings and Set in Her Proper Place," in *Essays on Mexican Art*, 257-258.

She brought to South America thirty-six works of art to exhibit and sell, and twenty more pictures were sent from Mexico, in addition to what she painted while she was there.[15] During this time, she focused on very Mexicanist themes, like Day of the Dead altars and maternity images, both of which acted as effective relaters of Mexican culture to her new South American audiences. Her travels abroad seem to have nourished Izquierdo's Mexicanist spirit. This was not an uncommon phenomenon; for example, Tarsila do Amaral cultivated some of the most definitive Brazilian modern works while in Paris in the 1920s.[16] And Pablo Neruda himself, the great poet who greeted Izquierdo so warmly in Chile in 1944, had himself recently returned from his post as Consul General in Mexico City, serving from 1940-1943. During this diplomatic mission,

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[15] Sylvia Navarrete, "María Izquierdo," in *María Izquierdo* (México, D.F.: Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, A.C., 1988), 89-90. Izquierdo had a second motive to travel to South America. After living with the Chilean painter Raúl Uribe for five years, he unexpectedly and abruptly decided to return to Chile, possibly for another woman. Izquierdo renegotiated her South American tour with the Mexican government to include a trip to Chile, where she tracked down Uribe and consolidated their relationship with a legal marriage. Ibid., 89; also see Raquel Tibol, "María Izquierdo," *Latin American Art* (Spring 1989), 25.

[16] Fatima Brecht, "Tarsila do Amaral," in *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1990), 52-53.

Neruda rewrote *Canto General de Chile*, transforming it into an epic poem about the whole South American continent, its nature, its people and its historical destiny.[17] It stands to reason that Izquierdo's travels through South America likewise charged her sense of nationalism and helped her hone the domestic altar and Madonna motifs that would define her production of the 1940s.

Izquierdo was celebrated in the foreign press, not only for her expressions of Mexican identity and culture, but also as a universal conduit of "Nuestra América," expanding the scope and international import of the heart of Izquierdo's artistic mission.[18] In an interview with the artist's daughters, Aurora Posadas Izquierdo recalled that the trip to South America meant a great deal to her mother personally.[19] This high profile position reinforced her importance and relevance both in and beyond Mexico's borders, and distinguished herself to the public as a leading Mexican modern artist and a preeminent and exemplary producer of the common culture of the Americas.

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[17] This work, entitled *Canto General*, was published in Mexico in 1950, and also underground in Chile. From *Nobel Lectures, Literature 1968-1980*, Editor-in-Charge Tore Frängsmyr, Editor Sture Allén, World Scientific Publishing Co., Singapore, 1993.

[18] "Vibra México en la pintura de María Izquierdo. Pero, no solo es México lo que la artista muestra… Hay en su "localismo," algo común a todos que vivimos en este continente cimbreado por los Andes. Es la matriz común, el color, el drama y el destino de América." Quote drawn from "Intensidad, ternura y agradable colorida hay en los cuadros de la pintura de María Izquierdo," 1944. The article from which this quote was drawn does not include a source title, but the article was clipped and kept in the artist's file at the Biblioteca de las Artes, CENIDIAP.

[19] The article from which this quote was drawn, clipped and kept in the artist's file, Volume 6, at the Biblioteca de las Artes, CENIDIAP, does not include a date. Victor Alba, "Trabajadora Inscansable, Madre Amorosa, Regañona y Polvorilla: Tal Es el Retrato que Pintan de su Madre las hijas de María Izquierdo," *Hoy*, 25.

In addition to these accolades, during this decade Izquierdo regularly graced the pages of Mexico City's major newspapers and magazines. She chronicled her travels through South America – through Guatemala, Panama, down to where she spent more significant time in Chile and Peru – and upon her return to Mexico, her travelogues appeared in series in *Excelsior* between November 1944 and April 1945. She wrote about the towns she visited, people that she met, and, importantly, the success of her own exhibitions and reception in these countries.[20] She also authored dozens of articles in Mexican dailies and periodicals on art criticism, promoting the work of up and coming artists and heralding the qualities in the painting of her peers that she admired.[21] Not only a byline, Izquierdo was frequently photographed at high society events, and numerous feature stories about the artist and her artwork appeared in the press.[22] For all intents and purposes, Izquierdo was growing into the role of the bourgeois Mexican celebrity that Ávila Camacho's mexicanist agenda fostered.

Mexican visual culture evolved dramatically in the 1940s. Ávila Camacho's political and cultural revamping of national identity coincided with the rapid growth of a vibrant cinema industry in Mexico. The 1940s in particular are best remembered as Mexico's Golden Age of cinema, during which time the movie industry in Mexico exploded, satisfying a new and huge audience of movie-goers across all economic classes.

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[20] Many of Izquierdo's articles and travelogues are collected and reprinted in *María Izquierdo* (México: Casa de Bolsa CREMI, 1986), 128-145.

[21] Izquierdo was a regular contributor to *Hoy* magazine between January 1942 through March 1943. Ibid.

[22] See, for example, Consuelo Colon R., "Actividades de la Mujer Mexicana: María Izquierdo," *El Universal Grafico*, 24 Sept 1943, p 12, 15. Many photographs of Izquierdo with other high profile figures are captured in *María Izquierdo* (1988).

One of the defining features of the Golden Age is the rise of the Mexican celebrity. The nationalistic genre of film was supported by a corresponding "star system," actors and actresses like Pedro Armendáriz, Mario Moreno (Cantinflas), María Félix, and Dolores del Río, who appeared in multiple features.[23] I argued in Chapter Three that Izquierdo conflated Virgin Mary imagery with her own self-portraiture in order to unmistakably assert her own cultural icon status and seal her public identity with *mexicanidad*. I believe that the very proliferation of self-portraits by Izquierdo in the 1940s was one means of participation in a burgeoning star system.

Filmmakers in Mexico's Golden Age of Cinema were intent on developing a distinctly Mexican cinema, in order to transform and successfully compete with an industry long dominated by Hollywood and European models. To this end, like visual artists of the post-Revolutionary era, they made national identity a prominent theme of their output. Film director Emilio 'El Indio' Fernández and cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa collaborated on twenty-four films between 1942 and 1956, and the team is credited with creating the classic Mexican film aesthetic. Their films consistently valued *mestizaje* (mixed race identity) as a means of shaping collective national identification and cultivated quintessential Mexican types and settings. The film industry's motivations complimented those of Ávila Camacho, with each party invested (ideologically and financially) in the manufacture of widely popular, Mexican, cultural icons.[24] In 1943, Fernández and Figueroa made María Candelaria, one of the most popular and acclaimed films of the Golden Age. Fernández cast Dolores del Río, a Mexican actress who had a successful Hollywood career for many years, in the title role. The portrayal of María Candelaria, a beautiful, noble, and struggling Indian woman often draped in the traditional *rebozo*, (fig. 4.2) clearly evokes the Mexican Madonna prototype set forth by many modern artists, and strongly developed by Izquierdo in these years.[25] Produced within the same year, the figural similarities between the women featured in Izquierdo's *Maternidad* (1943) (fig. 3.1), *Mujer mexicana* (1943) (fig. 3.7), and the mass-produced poster publicizing Dolores del Río in the title role of the acclaimed María Candelaria (1943) (fig. 4.3) are striking. In each, the *rebozo*, singularly evocative of race, gender, and nation, frames a face of Mexican feminine persona – a persona that the viewer simultaneously experiences as belonging to a fictional subject *and* to an actual, famous figure.

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[23] Carl J. Mora, "War and Growth of a Major Film Industry, 1940-1946," in *Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society, 1896-1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 57.

MARKET SUCCESS

Izquierdo's comprehensive marketing strategy was influenced by yet another force: the Chilean painter Raúl Uribe, who Izquierdo met in 1938 and married in 1944.

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[24] See Joanne Hershfield, "Race and Ethnicity in the Classical Cinema," in *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers*, eds. Joanne Hershfield and David R. Maciel (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 81-82.

[25] Andrea Noble, *Mexican National Cinema* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 81.

Usually, contemporary scholarly accounts grant Uribe a small, if any, mention in Izquierdo's life and career, with the notable exception of Sylvia Navarrete's essay in the 1988 retrospective catalogue *María Izquierdo*.[26] But anecdotes offered by friends and associates who knew the couple – such as Lola Álvarez Bravo, Juan Soriano, and Inés Amor – make it apparent that Uribe played a noteworthy role in Izquierdo's professional pursuits of the 1940s.

Uribe came to Mexico from Chile in 1937 to study mural painting. Inés Amor, director of the Galería de Arte Mexicano in Mexico City, summed him up as "a man equipped with all the tricks to stage an impressive act of the truth."[27] Intent on cultivating social status, Uribe fashioned himself not only as a painter but as an affluent, well-connected diplomat. He sought out and developed relationships with Mexico City's diplomats, politicians and elite.[28] Uribe and Izquierdo's interests in climbing the ladder – he, the social ladder, and she, the professional – were compatible, and his ability to network mixed with her artistic talent was a powerful combination for this couple. Uribe also continued to paint, but neither at the level of quantity nor quality of the work of

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[26] Navarrete, in *María Izquierdo*, 81-82, 89-92, 107.

[27] "…hombre dotado con todas las artimañas para montar un teatro impresionante de verdad." Inés Amor, *Una mujer en el arte mexicano: memorias de Inés Amor,* Jorge Alberto Manrique and Teresa del Conde eds. (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1987, 2005), 54. Sylvia Navarrete also details information about Uribe's unsavory business practices. It was said that he identified suitable clients and directed María to paint their portraits. When the portrait was finished, Raúl sent it to the model along with a bill. Ibid., 82.

[28] Ibid.

Izquierdo. Inés Amor famously noted that he was a "dreadful painter, so bad that I don't even remember how he painted."[29]

Scholars of the period, as well as many who were close to Izquierdo, contended that Uribe was a terrible influence on her personally and on her work.[30] Uribe lived out his own ambitions of grandeur through Izquierdo; her painting career was their collective mission. Lola Alvarez Bravo said it was Uribe's idea for Izquierdo to paint pictures in series,[31] which is one reason why so many *altares*, Madonnas and portraits appear in Izquierdo's work in these years. Uribe encouraged Izquierdo to concentrate on the marketability and sale of her work, and self-promotion became a job on par with that of her painting, a fact that many observers, such as Elena Poniatowska, note with a degree of scorn: “Raul Uribe is a social climber… He taught María to paint with a second intention: to cash in.”[32] There is often contempt for the artist who openly concentrates on marketing their wares, but few artists could survive without it. Indeed, male artists like Diego Rivera and Rufino Tamayo are rarely criticized for employing similar professional tactics. However unsavory Izquierdo’s strategy was in the opinion of her peers and scholars, it seemed to work. In a 1943 interview she proudly boasted an anecdote of a North American woman who came to Mexico to buy truly Mexican painting, and she found that in only three painters was there an authentic Mexican character: Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, and herself. The woman bought two Riveras, one Kahlo, “and eight of mine.”[33] Regardless of this one North American woman’s artistic preferences, the fact that Izquierdo reported these figures to the press made clear that selling her artwork – and, no less, out-doing the Riveras – was a serious professional goal, a source of pride, and an argument for her ability to equal and even surpass the achievements of one of the *Tres Grandes*.

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[29] Amor said that Uribe was a "pésimo pintor, tan malo que ni recuerdo cómo pintaba." Amor, 55. While Uribe, alongside Izquierdo, was included in MacKinley Helm's comprehensive survey of contemporary artists *Modern Mexican Painters*, published in the United States in 1941, history has otherwise forgotten him as a painter. *The Spinners* of 1939 is a watercolor painting that clearly draws from the Mexican School; naïve painterly qualities of the street and buildings mix with the heavy, full-bodied rendering of the young boys in the neo-classical style used by Jesús Guerrero Galván and others. The posturing of the figures is very awkward, and the perspective and proportion of the figures to their setting are likewise heavily distorted. A later work, *Los cirqueros* of 1945, is closely linked in theme to Izquierdo's beloved circus paintings. Uribe plays with overtly fantastic elements in this interplay of sinners and saints under the big top.

[30] "I told her not to marry Uribe," Juan Soriano relayed to Elena Poniatowska later in his life, "but she was so in love with him." ("Yo le decía que no le hiciera caso al Uribe, pero nunca lo logré porque estaba muy enamorada de él.") Juan Soriano quoted in Elena Poniatowska, *Las Siete Cabritas* (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 2000), 104. In the end, Soriano would be right. Raquel Tibol notes that as time wore on, Izquierdo and Uribe's relationship grew strained, and "(i)n the seven remaining years of her life, beset by doubts, fears, and pain, she suffered two more strokes and her relationship with Uribe sank to bitter new depths. She filed for divorce in 1953." Raquel Tibol, "María Izquierdo," *Latin American Art* (Spring 1989): 25.

[31] Olivier Debroise, "El espíritu rojo no ha muerto (María Izquierdo)," in *Figuras en el Trópico, Plástica Mexicana 1920-1940* (Barcelona: Ediciones Océano, 1984), 165.

In short, Izquierdo directed her energies not only towards her artistic output, but also to her public role as an artist and national celebrity. For all of her efforts, Izquierdo was rewarded by her peers, by her government, and by the media in the form of creative, financial and publicity opportunities. These endeavors were crucial to her market success in Mexico and the United States, which became a genuine possibility and serious consideration for Izquierdo in the 1940s.

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[32] “Raúl Uribe es un *social climber*… Le enseña a María a pintar con una segunda intención: cobrar.” Elena Poniatowska, *Las Siete Cabritas* (Mexico: Ediciones Era, 2000), 103.

[33] Colon R., “Actividades de la Mujer Mexicana: María Izquierdo,” 15.

For many years after the Revolution, a viable, sustained art market did not exist in Mexico; for this reason, many artists sought representation in New York and sold paintings right out of their studios.[34] By the mid 1930s more of an established art market began to develop in Mexico. Carolina Amor opened the Galería de Arte Mexicano in 1935 in Mexico City, and her sister Inés Amor became recognized as the first important Mexican dealer of modern art.[35] There were several important Mexican collectors, including Marte R. Gomez, Alvar Carrillo Gil, Dolores Olmedo and María Asúnsulo.[36] Artists also enjoyed the impact of Hollywood and the growing local industry, as directors (such as John Ford and John Huston) producers (Jacques Gelman), and actors (Paulette Goddard) who both vacationed and made films south of the border purchased works of Mexican modern art.[37]

The United States held a large stake in Mexico's art market in the 1940s. In fact, the Galería de Arte Mexicano catered to the growing interests of U.S. collectors, for whom Abstract Expressionism, a la Jackson Pollock and others associated with the New

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[34] James Oles, "Colecciones disueltas: sobre unos extranjeros y muchos cuadros mexicanos," in *Patrocinio, colección y circulación de las artes: XX Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1997), 623.

[35] On Carolina Amor's opening of the gallery, see Amor, 27-31. James Oles laments that there does not exist an adequate history of foreign collectors of Mexican art. The only important public source, he believes, is Inés Amor's *Una mujer en el arte mexicano: memorias de Inés Amor*, a "fragmented memoir," and "understandably limited to her own experience." Ibid., 625.

[36] Many modern Mexican artists painted María Asúnsulo's portrait, Izquierdo among them; there is a gallery room dedicated to several of these paintings in the Museo Nacional de Arte in Mexico City.

[37] Oles, 629.

York School, was not yet in a dominant market position.[38] Several prestigious institutions, competing with one another to expand their collections and strengthen their credentials in modern art, purchased significant quantities of art of the Americas and mounted touring exhibitions of Latin American art. The success of the "blockbuster" exhibition *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1940 encouraged increased funding for the purchase of art from Mexico and other Latin American countries.[39] In conjunction with MacKinley Helm's book on the same subject, the *Modern Mexican Painters* exhibition was held at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston in 1941.[40] In 1943, Henry Clifford, a close friend of Helm's and a client of Inés Amor, organized the *Mexican Art Today* show at the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

The fact that Izquierdo's style noticeably changed around the year 1940 is well documented; her work moved from the gritty, earthy watercolors expressing mysticism and angst of the 1930s to a vibrant palette of oils depicting Mexican material culture and iconic figures like the Virgin Mary and Izquierdo herself. Indeed, this shift was in part responsive to the changing art market in Mexico. These Mexicanist scenes did well on the market, whereas her avant-garde paintings of the 1930s did not.[41]

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[38] Catha Paquette, "U.S. Perceptions of Art Both Mexican and Modern: The Collecting, Publishing, and Curatorial Activities of MacKinley Helm," in *Patrocinio, colección y circulación de las artes: XX Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte*, 642, 656.

[39] Since its first exhibition of Diego Rivera's work in 1931, just two years after the museum's opening, the Museum of Modern Art was a leader in the United States in exhibiting works of art from Latin America, ancient through modern. The musuem's permanent collection of Latin American art began in 1935 with Abby Aldrich Rockefeller's donation of Orozco's 1928 *The Subway*. In 1942, under the auspices of the museum's Inter-American Fund, Alfred H. Barr and Edgar J. Kaufmann traveled to Mexico and Cuba, while Lincoln Kirstein went to South America, in order to purchase acquisitions for the collection. For a summary of the New York Museum of Modern Art's Latin American exhibition and collection history in the twentieth century, see Waldo Rasmussen, "Introduction," *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, 11-17.

[40] In her memoirs, Inés Amor credits MacKinley Helm's book, Modern Mexican Painters, with being an important means by which Mexican modern art crossed the border. Paquette, 660.

Along with the many shifts that Izquierdo underwent personally and professionally around 1940 – from living independently to having Raúl Uribe in her life, from a bohemian mode of dress to clothing suited for the upper class, from a darling of the avant-garde to conquering the mainstream market – many scholars feel that the quality of her artwork suffered. For example, Olivier Debroise remarked in *Figuras en el trópico, plástica mexicana 1920-1940*, that in the 1940s, "(t)he painting of María Izquierdo lost part of its expressive violence and its spontaneity," as her painting became less dramatic and more joyous.[42] Sylvia Navarrete blames Uribe's intervention in Izquierdo's career for a downturn in the quality of her work, arguing that Izquierdo's "coarsely graceful vision, imaginative and fresh, poetic with surrealist touches, took a rather sentimental, mundane and uniform turn."[43] But Navarrete goes on to concede that in this time Izquierdo underwent "a notable thematic renovation" with a new emphasis on still life, landscape, portraiture, and "a new genre that occupied a great part of her labor:

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[41] This observation is expressed in letters from Izquierdo to Inés Amor, held in the artist's file at the Galería de Arte Mexicano, Mexico City. Adriana Zavala, "Tamayo's Women," in *Tamayo: Modern Icon Reinterpreted*, 214, 223.

[42] "La pintura de María Izquierdo pierde parte de su violencia expresiva, de su espontaneidad." Debroise, 165.

[43] "Su visión toscamente graciosa, imaginativa y fresca, poética con toques surrealistas, tomó un giro un tanto cursi, mundano y uniformado." Navarrete, 82.

the *alacena*."[44] Indeed, these thematic renovations represent the majority of her work in the 1940s. Elena Poniatowska, who disparaged Uribe's influence over Izquierdo from her artistic choices to her adoption of "aristocratic" dress, noted that Izquierdo's output in this decade "also became more sophisticated."[45] These scholars lamented the transitions made by Izquierdo between the 1930s and the 1940s, but their admiration, at times romanticized, of her early work clouds their understanding of her mature art-making. Izquierdo's output in the 1940s, each scholar reluctantly admits, include her most trademark paintings.

It is unfair to single out and castigate Izquierdo for catering to the market, both as a woman who raised three children and experienced her share of financial hardship and as a modern artist engaged with a global audience thirsty for things Mexican. Certainly, without the marketing strategies employed by Izquierdo and Uribe – such as the move to paint themes like her *altares*, Madonnas, *alacenas* and self-portraits in series – the artist may not have enjoyed the legacy that she does today.[46] Further, her paintings in series resulted in a large body of work that, *en masse*, asserted a feminized body of Mexicanist work divergent from the Revolutionary Hero model reinforced by Mexican muralism.

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[44] "Por otro lado, en estos años tampoco hay notable renovación temática. María sigue desarrollando sus temas pasados, con marcado preferencia por la naturaleza muerta, el paisaje (la troje), el retrato obviamente, y por un nuevo género que ocupa desde ahora gran parte de su labor: la alacena." Ibid.

[45] Poniatowska, *True Poetry*, 86. In the same article, Poniatowska also noted that during her relationship with Uribe, Izquierdo traded her bohemian lifestyle of the previous decade for that of a high society socialite. Her manner of dress changed, from the eccentric make-up and traditional Mexican clothing to a more cultivated look, one suitable for a woman who was "no longer nibbling on corn, but rather on canapés." Ibid, 85-86.

[46] Izquierdo's work was declared National Patrimony of Mexico in 2002.

The promotional tactics that Izquierdo employed successfully established her name in the field, transformed the presence of women in modern Mexican art, and catapulted her career to higher levels. Izquierdo was naturally assertive, outspoken, and highly ambitious – qualities, socially speaking, that are positive in men but off-putting in women. Her cultivation of her public name, her professional stature, her multiple portraits and focus on women as subjects of her paintings, and her explorations of Mexican feminine identity all fused to create a place for women and for herself in modern Mexican art.

A MURALIST IS BORN

By the mid-1940s, Izquierdo had captured the attention of the government and the public; her paintings were selling; she regularly appeared in the press as both subject and writer; and she was exhibiting her work locally and internationally. For all intents and purposes, publicizing herself as a prominent Mexican artist became as steady and intense a job as producing the art that made her so. Izquierdo managed to solidify her professional success, but a significant achievement still lay out of reach. In an interview from 1943, Izquierdo shared her love of painting and dedication to a variety of genres (landscapes, portraits and still-lifes) and technical media (watercolor, gouache, oil and woodcut). “Also,” she added, “I would paint *al fresco* if I was given the opportunity to do so, but until now these jobs were confined only to male masters, denying women this field, which to this day has been forbidden me in my own country. Probably, in my case, the term ‘no one is a prophet in her own land’ was born.”[47] Izquierdo characteristically exuded self-confidence in the press, but despite all of her achievements, her career would be incomplete without earning this measure of success. I argue that Izquierdo actively cultivated her celebrity status in both art and society with her sights set on the ultimate achievement in the modern Mexican art world: to obtain a major mural commission and hoist herself to the ranks of the most highly esteemed artists in the country, namely, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

Robin Greeley and Adriana Zavala astutely observe that like other members of the avant-garde, Izquierdo worked in opposition to the program of the muralists as a means of carving out a distinct identity in Mexican art.[48] Each scholar notes that Los Contemporáneos and allied critics appropriated Izquierdo in their anti-Muralist aims and rhetoric, particularly in the 1930s. But it must be acknowledged that by the 1940s Izquierdo felt allegiance to both the avant-garde and the mainstream; if the heart of her work, with its emphasis on women, lay in the margins, the promotion and elevation of it relied on participating in the center. While Izquierdo’s painting consistently demonstrates an alternative discourse to that of the highly political and masculine bravado of the Muralists, it is clear that Izquierdo no less actively pursued and positioned herself to attain a space in this highest echelon of Mexican art.

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[47] “…también pintaría al fresco si me dieran la oportunidad para ello – pues tengo realizados ya varios ensayos y preparaciones – pero hasta ahora solo confían esos trabajos a los maestros varones, negando a las mujeres ese campo que hasta ahora me ha sido vedado en mi propio país. Probablemente, en mi caso, se cumpla la sentencía de que “nadie es profeta en su tierra”…” Izquierdo quoted in Colon R., “Actividades de la Mujer Mexicana: María Izquierdo,” 12, 15.

[48] See Robin Adèle Greeley, “Painting Mexican Identities: Nationalism and Gender in the Work of María Izquierdo,” *Oxford Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2000): 51-72; and Adriana Zavala, “María Izquierdo,” in *The Eagle and the Virgin: Nation and Cultural Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940*, eds. Mary Kay Vaughan and Stephen E. Lewis (Durham, Duke University Press, 2006), 67-79. Also, in her dissertation, María de Jesus González elaborates Izquierdo’s relationship with Los Contemporáneos. María de Jesus González, *The Art of Maria Izquierdo: Formative Years 1928 to 1934* (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1998).

At last, Izquierdo's rising fame culminated in a historic feat. On February 19, 1945, Izquierdo signed a contract with Mexico City's governor, Javier Rojo Gómez, to paint in fresco in the central stairwell of the Palacio del Departamento del Distrito Federal on the theme of the progress of Mexico City. In the twenty-five years of the great Mexican Mural Renaissance, the medium had been nearly exclusively in the realm of male painters.[49] Few other women had the opportunity to paint murals in Mexico. Before Izquierdo, two Brooklyn-born sisters, Marion (1909-1970) and Grace Greenwood (1902-1979), painted several murals in the early- to mid-1930s in Taxco, Michoacán and in the Mercado del Carmen in Mexico City. They were trained in Mexico City by Pablo O'Higgins and received high praise from Diego Rivera.[50] Some scholars have speculated as to why it was that foreign women fared better in Mexico's art world than Mexican women. James Oles cites the persistent conservatism about women's roles and behavioral expectations in Mexico even in the post-Revolutionary era. He writes, "women were discouraged from assuming overly public roles… Though one could become an artist or even an art dealer, it was less easy to leave home to work on the scaffolds, wearing overalls like a common worker."[51] Robert McKee Irwin attributes the success of foreign female writers to their distance from the dominant construction of masculine, male, nationalist culture.[52] As foreigners, the Greenwood Sisters were at a remove that did not threaten the cultural order.

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[49] Not only were there so few women muralists, but prior to the fifties and sixties, there were no major women writers in Mexico, largely due to persistent sexism within national literary institutions. Though Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Nellie Campobello, Antonieta Rivas Mercado, and Guadalupe Marín are recognized today as important Mexican writers, the best-known women to have written in Mexico in the 150 years after independence from Spain were the Scottish visitor Frances Calderón de la Barca and the Chilean guest Gabriela Mistral. See Robert McKee Irwin, *Mexican Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xiv.

[50] James Oles, "The Mexican Experience of Marion and Grace Greenwood," in *The Eagle and the Virgin*, 79-89. Oles published two previous essays on the Greenwood sisters: see "The Mexican Murals of Marion and Grace Greenwood," in *Out of Context: American Artists Abroad*, ed. Laura Fattal and Carol Salus (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003); and *Las hermanas Greenwood en México* (Mexico City: Conaculta, 2000).

The first mural painted by a Mexican female artist in Mexico was executed by painter Aurora Reyes (1902-1985). Her fresco, *Ataque a la maestra rural (Attack on the Rural Teacher)* of 1936, was produced for the Centro Escolar Revolución in downtown Mexico City, where it still stands.[53] As it happened, Aurora Reyes was a frequent guest at Izquierdo's salon-type gatherings in the 1930s, according to Izquierdo's children, Aurora and Carlos.[54] Reyes, similar to Izquierdo, was a single mother of two children, lectured on the position of women in art and society, and was politically outspoken and committed to the rights and education of women and children.[55] Izquierdo's friendship with Reyes may have been a profound influence on Izquierdo's drive to secure a mural commission – and a step up to a commission with a higher profile than one for a school – for herself.

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[51] Oles, 88-89.

[52] Irwin, xiv.

[53] Dina Comisarenco Mirkin, "Aurora Reyes's "Ataque a la Maestra Rural": The First Mural Created by a Mexican Female Artist." *Women's Art Journal* 26, no. 2 (Autumn 2005 - Winter 2006), 19-25.

[54] From an interview with Izquierdo's children Aurora and Carlos; see González, 41.

[55] Reyes earned her living as a teacher in the public schools. Comisarenco Mirkin, 19-20.

Setting a new milestone, Izquierdo was the first Mexican woman to receive a major government mural commission, a fact that did not go unobserved at the time.[56]

Izquierdo promptly set to work on the project. She drew sketches of her plans, worked with chemists to prepare the fresco paints, and later in the year set to work on site (fig. 4.4). Her mural cycle represented Mexico's history and development.[57] In the Mexican murals of the post-Revolutionary period, this was a common social realist theme. In his cycle at the National Preparatory School (1923-24, 1926), José Clemente Orozco explored the effects of the Euro-Indian culture collision after the point of conquest in panels like *Cortés y la Malinche* (fig. 3.3), depicted relatively graphic scenes of violence of the 1910 Revolution, and also reflected on the subsequent emotional wounds of the conflict, as in *La familia (The Family)* (fig. 2.20). Diego Rivera's epic mural treatment of the *History of Mexico* at the Palacio Nacional (1930) (fig. 4.5), located in the heart of Mexico City, tirelessly charts Mexico's ancient, colonial, and recent revolutionary past, as well as a Marxist perspective on Mexico's present.

Izquierdo's approach to the history and progress of Mexico, however, steered away from the violent revolutionary imagery, specific historical protagonists, and politicized themes that anchor these narratives. *Anteproyecto para el mural de la escalera*

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[56] See Carlos Denegri, "María Izquierdo Encargado de Pintar los Frescos del ex-Palacio Municipal," *Excelsior*, 14 Feb 1945.

[57] Raquel Tibol laments Izquierdo's choice of subject matter for the mural. She notes that up to that point, Izquierdo had made a real name for herself with her unique style, themes, and palette. In the end, instead of proposing a mural composition reflective of her unique contribution to contemporary Mexican painting, such as "the metaphysical spaces of Giorgio de Chirico," or "the traditional *alacenas* in which objects acquire ethnic elegance and symbolic ambiguity," she rather went in the "superficially didactic and discursive" direction of Mexican muralism. Raquel Tibol, "María Izquierdo," in *Ser y ver: Mujeres en las artes visuales* (Mexico: Plaza & Janés Editores, 2002), 104.

monumental del edificio del Departmento Central del Distrito Federal (Draft for the mural for the monumental stairwell of the Department of the Federal District government building) was sketched in ink (fig. 4.6) and fleshed out in gouache in a second version (fig. 4.7). In the composition, ancient and modern worlds mirror one another. On the left, an Aztec leader holds a codex of the "Ciudad de México." He is symmetrically complimented in the right portion of the mural by a modern community leader – this time, a woman – who holds the blueprint for "la Ciudad de México (actual) 1945."[58] Transformation in the centuries' and civilizations' architecture, transportation, weaponry, dress and scientific technology – and, conspicuously, a transformation of gender roles – are quite plainly transposed from the left to right. An hourglass in the center of the composition marks literally the passage of time. Rather than presenting a history of Mexico steeped in the rhetoric of political gains and bloody sacrifice that continued to inform major mural cycles even twenty five years after the 1910 Revolution, Izquierdo instead chose to focus on a historical narrative that highlighted Mexico's cultural contributions and recent record of modern industrial progress, both of which were well funded under the Ávila Camacho administration's economic landscape. In this way, Izquierdo's historicizing mural can be distinguished from those of her predecessors as a conscious strategy to stray from the course of the Revolutionary narrative set forth by Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros.

Another section of Izquierdo's mural depicts two different modes of processing corn, the staple of the Mexican diet. Through this comparison, Izquierdo explores dualities of past and present, rural and urban, and private and public (fig. 4.8). Framing the sides of a doorway, on the left, a rural woman scrapes corn off the cob by hand. On the opposite side of the door, two women tend to a machine that processes the grain; in the background, rounding out this industrial picture but, notably, not at the forefront, men carry out tasks of military activity and scientific study. The rural woman is seated in a pastoral setting, while the participants in industry are configured as a tightly compressed succession of images of modern scientific and military advances. Pictorially, the imbalance of the rural family's open landscape versus the collage of various industrial figures evokes the spatial differences between rural and urban living. In the 1940s, Mexico's economy expanded at a fast pace, the middle class grew, and cities grew with migration from the countryside. Between 1940 and 1960, "a 120 percent jump in industrial production and a 100 percent increase in agricultural output" occurred.[59] Opportunities opened for women in the labor sector, particularly in domestic labor, but women usually had the worst paying jobs.[60]

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[58] Comparing Izquierdo's mural sketches to Diego Rivera's mural at the La Raza Hospital (1953), Robin Greeley points out that in Rivera's work, "women act only as helpers, never as leaders." Greeley, 59.

Together, the two scenes also expose the tension between a woman's private and public spheres, and are open to a variety of interpretations. The rural woman, concentrating on her task, is flanked by her three children; the preparation of the corn is part of her task of maintaining the home. The opposite pair of women, on the other hand, is portrayed in their role of assembly workers, processing mass amounts of corn for anonymous consumption. They work in an industrial setting where they are suspended from their familial ties. At first glance, and in keeping with the theme of historical progress in Mexico, Izquierdo's two compositions compare traditional, rural modes of food production versus modern methods of industry. Modern, industrial technologies opened new roles in the work force for women and expanded their economic and experiential possibilities, which Izquierdo valued highly. However, understanding the value that Izquierdo likewise held for motherhood, custom, the home, and women's processes of domestic creation, Izquierdo's juxtaposition of scenes complicates the notion of the woman's role in industrialized labor as absolute "progress." Izquierdo effectively portrayed not only what society at large and women in particular gained via technical progress, but what each risked sacrificing. She later wrote in "Carta a las mujeres de México" ("A Letter to the Women of Mexico") in 1950, "In this, our era, the woman begins to have an importance that at times makes her equal to man; these conquests, as I see it, at the same time emancipate woman from a dark and unjust past and create for her new obligations and responsibilities."[61] Her words demonstrate that she understood firsthand the virtues and complexities of women's entrance into the workforce.

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[59] Joanne Hershfield, *Mexican Cinema/Mexican Women, 1940-1950* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1996), 28.

[60] Julia Tuñón Pablos, *Women in Mexico: A Past Unveiled*, trans. Alan Hynds (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1987), 104.

Labor was a primary theme in another famed mural in Mexico City, Diego Rivera's *Court of Labor* mural cycle at the Ministry of Public Education, executed in 1926. *La mecanización del campo (The Mechanization of the Country)* (fig. 4.9) deals with the economic structure of the *hacienda* and the exploitation of the worker. A recurring motif in the cycle, the heads of capitalism are cast as villains; on the left side of this scene, a goddess figure suspended in the sky shoots lightening bolts down on the landlord and his cronies. In the distance, large tractors harvest the fields; aqueducts, train tracks, and telephone lines reconfigure the landscape; and an airplane soars overhead. Modern technologies transform traditional methods of farming, and judging by the fate that the goddess bestows upon the landlord, it does not seem that Rivera is entirely optimistic about this process of industrialization. The hope for the future instead lies in the right side of the composition, in the union of soldier, farmer, and worker.[62]

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[61] "En esta nuestra época, la mujer empieza a tener una importancia que a veces iguala con el hombre; estas conquistas, según mi punta vista, a la vez que emancipan a la mujer de un pasado obscuro e injusto, le crean nuevas obligaciones y responsabilidades." María Izquierdo, "Carta a las mujeres de México," *Zócalo*, no. 2, 24 Oct 1950.

At the center of *La mecanización del campo*, surrounded by stalks of corn and wheat, sits an Indian woman. Solid, erect, and with a steely frontal gaze, she holds two ears of corn in her hands. Through this statuesque woman, Rivera demonstrated the importance of the crop to the Mexican people, and idealized the notion that the Indian anchored modern Mexico to tradition and to the land. Further, as he also asserted in his mural cycle in Chapingo, Rivera emphasized a strong, symbolic connection of the feminine to the land. Just as the trope of the weeping woman often stood for the collective grief of a Revolution-torn nation, as Chapter Two illustrates, women in western art have consistently represented the earthly and the natural. Izquierdo also established this connection in her depiction of the rural woman seated on the ground and preparing corn, and again in another preparatory sketch for her mural cycle, *La tierra (The Land)*; the sketch was the basis for the 1945 painting by the same title (fig. 4.10). In this composition, Izquierdo combines the two potent tropes of the weeping woman and the earth mother. A long, white *rebozo* is loosely draped over the woman's head and wrapped around her shoulders; he face is upturned and beset with a furrowed brow, closed eyes and anguished expression. One of the rare paintings of a nude figure in the 1940s, the sheath of fabric barely covers one breast and her genitalia.[63] The ochre and brown tonalities which make up the woman's exposed dark skin are similar in color and handling to the dry, vast earth itself, further unifying this Indian woman with the land that she kneels upon and grips with her right hand. The extremely tight cropping of the figure on the canvas suggests not only the woman's connection to the land, but her suffocation by it. Elizabeth Ferrer believes that "(i)n conflating this figure with the earth, Izquierdo identifies women as fertile, powerful and solid,"[64] but Izquierdo does not do so without falling into some of the usual traps in representations of women in modern Mexican art. In the context of the mural cycle, in order to illustrate women's persistence and ultimate success in society, as Izquierdo demonstrated in the woman's role as architect in the stairwell mural sketches, she also relied on established tropes that demonstrate that women characteristically suffer situations that necessitate perseverance. Another mural sketch, *La tragedia* (*The Tragedy*) (fig. 4.11), depicts a woman running, clearly in fear, but the external forces at work in this sketch are unclear.

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[62] Rivera advocated for harmony and commonality between the rural and urban proletariat. See Luis E. Carranza, *Architecture as Revolution: Episodes in the History of Modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 48.

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[63] In her recent book, Adriana Zavala analyzes the prevalence and expressive power of the nude figure in Izquierdo's work of the 1930s. It is significant to note that, in the 1940s, Izquierdo rarely painted nude figures. See Adriana Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition: Women, Gender and Representation in Mexican Art* (Penn State University Press, 2010), 214-218.

[64] "An allegorical representation of the land a woman, it pictures a nude, kneeling figure who appears robust, yet gripped with anguish. In conflating this figure with the earth, Izquierdo identifies women as fertile, powerful and solid." Ferrer, "A Singular Path: The Artistic Development of María Izquierdo," 27.

What balances Izquierdo's scenes of tragedy and pain, played out on the bodies of women, are multiple other types of positive images of women in the cycle. In Izquierdo's studies for the Palacio's stairwell *plafones*, or ceiling rosettes (fig. 4.12), women once again dominate; out of nine figures, only one male, viewed from behind, is depicted as an orchestral conductor. The other eight women are creators (not just muses) of painting, sculpture, dance, music, and literature. As ceiling rosettes, these images would connect the multiple wall images, including those of suffering women, with the assertion that women are active producers of Mexican culture. In the same vein, another wall in the cycle was to contain an image entitled *La música* (*The Music*) (fig. 4.13).[65] A photograph captured Izquierdo at work on this mural (fig. 4.4). A watercolor study, from which the mural was executed, depicts a sensuous, full-length form of a partially robed female suspended in a sky of puffy clouds, evocative of colonial religious art. Another woman's face can be discerned in the clouds to which the classicized, floating female figure conducts music. The women in the *plafones* and in *La música* are depicted as both artists and muses; and as Izquierdo made explicit in this decade's series of self-portraits, these women act not only as inspirations and objects of art, but they are the creators of it. As Izquierdo illuminated in her series of domestic altar paintings, women are not passive consumers of Mexican culture, but rather active participants and propagators of national art and custom. Again, undermining mainstream muralism's portrayal of the key players of Mexican society as almost exclusively male and virile, Izquierdo honored creative forces of culture over destructive ones.

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[65] The original mural of *La música* (271 x 232 x 31 cm), executed in tempera on cement, was preserved and is kept in the collection of INBA. See *María Izquierdo*, 348.

In some regards, with its references to Mexican customs and historical progress, Izquierdo's mural concepts take some of their cues directly from existing post-Revolutionary murals. However, in Izquierdo's mural, she manages to turn the patriarchal terms of muralism against itself. Women are figured as leaders and are the primary actors in most scenes. Robin Greeley notes that her mural represents "not an attempt to fit her work within their dominant paradigm, but rather the necessity of engaging in a public dialogue with the discourse provided by the Muralists in order to state her differences from it."[66] Although Izquierdo went against the grain of the avant-garde in her pursuit of a major mural, her refusal to engage fully the muralists' ideological program – one that posits men as Revolutionary heroes and women, if represented at all, as victims or subordinate helpers – is evident. In her mural plans and sketches, she straddles performing in the narrative of nationalism while at the same time distinguishes herself from it.

"ESCÁNDALO ARTÍSTICO"

Izquierdo's models gender equality in her mural sketches did not neatly mirror her own experiences as a female painter. Despite her successes, Izquierdo met a lot of resistance in her climb up the professional ladder. She did not shy from using her space in the public eye to speak out about discriminatory practices against women in her own field and in Mexican society at large. While many scholars have acknowledged Izquierdo's many statements about women in the arts and in society as evidence of her concern for rights of women and for herself, her location on the front lines of the battle for gender equality have not been fully contextualized within the trajectory of her career. Elaborating on her "Women in Mexican Art" radio address that she delivered in the July 1939, she further delineated the challenges posed to the woman artist in an article entitled "La mujer que pinta" ("The Woman Who Paints") in *Hoy* magazine in 1942:

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[66] Greeley, 59.

> The first obstacle that a woman painter must overcome is the old belief that a woman belongs in the home with her domestic duties. When she 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 dedicated as they are to the same creative labor. No, on the contrary, they see in her an obstacle, an inferior competitor whom they must attack venomously.[67]

Her words were virtually prophetic.

Izquierdo had already begun painting her mural at the Palacio when, in September 1945, the commission was suddenly withdrawn. Accounts reveal that the governor, Javier Rojo Gómez, sought the input of Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros regarding the progress of Izquierdo's work. The muralists pronounced that Izquierdo's murals were not well suited for the Palacio. Rojo Gómez subsequently dismissed Izquierdo from this location, but offered, in an attempt to keep good on the terms of their contract, to allow her to execute her proposed work in a school or a market.[68] Izquierdo outright refused any alternative, lesser commissions, and she considered the whole affair humiliating and unjust.[69]

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[67] Quoted in English in Raquel Tibol, "María Izquierdo," *Latin American Art* (Spring 1989), 23-24. Tibol cites the original source: María Izquierdo, "La mujer que pinta," *Hoy*, 24 Oct 1942.

[68] Accounts of the commission withdrawal are found in Navarrete, 92-93; and Luis-Martín Lozano, "Regarding Modern Mexican Painting: María Izquierdo (1902-1955)," in *María Izquierdo, 1902-1955* (Chicago: Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, 1996), 47-49.

Izquierdo did not take her dismissal lying down. She quickly organized a body of supportive artists and critics, and even threatened to sue the government for breach of contract.[70] In an interview with the artist published in June of 1946, Izquierdo shared her perspective on the "*junta secreta*" of *Los Trés Grandes* and Governor Rojo Gómez. She responded to Rojo Gómez's offer to execute her murals in a more "fitting" location. "It's not the same," argued Izquierdo, "painting the walls of the Palacio de Gobierno and painting the walls of a market or school." Indeed, she was right, for a mural in the seat of patriarchal power could not compare to the feminized, subordinated realms of *maestras* and family consumers. She continued, "no painter that decorates these buildings has gained fame. … Orozco can paint a restroom and people will go to see this restroom … but starting out it's not the same."[71] The next month, *Excelsior* published a letter from David Alfaro Siqueiros to María Izquierdo to clarify his position on the matter. The tone of the letter is amicable yet patronizing, assuring her that the "*junta secreta*" to which she referred was “an absurd and malicious rumor.” He maintained that he opposed the nullification of Izquierdo’s contract, and, with an equally condescending alternative as that offered by Rojo Gómez, proposed instead that Izquierdo be guided by muralists older and more experienced than she in the realization of her definitive work.[72]

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[69] "Pintora María Izquierdo y los Proyectos Murales," *Esto*, Segunda Sección, 27 Sep 1945.

[70] Izquierdo threatened to sue the government for the $34,843.50 for breach of contract upon having the mural commission taken away from her. "María Izquierdo demandará al Gobierno de D. Federal," *El Popular*, 27 Dec 1945.

[71] "No es lo mismo – pintar las paredes del Palacio de Gobierno que pintar las de un Mercado o una Escuela… ningún pintor de los que decoran estos edificios ha ganado fama. … Orozco puede pintar hasta un retrete y la gente irá a ver este retrete … Pero para empezar no es lo mismo." Quote drawn from a portion of newspaper article in the artist's file, Volume 3, at the Biblioteca de las Artes, CENIDIAP; the full citation was not included with the newspaper clipping, but a portion of the title is "…pasiones… de María Izquierdo," and the article was dated 5 Jun 1946.

In defense of her artistic merits, Izquierdo produced two portable murals, *La música (Music)* (fig. 4.13) and *La tragedía (Tragedy)* (fig. 4.11), based on two of her mural sketches, and exhibited the panels in her home in May of 1946.[73] As Anna Indych-López argues, the portable mural had been an effective vehicle for Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros in the promotion of their work in the United States in the 1930s.[74] Izquierdo turned to the format to showcase her work from the halted project and to prove to her critics and colleagues that she was indeed qualified for the task of mural painting.[75]

In the years following the mural dismissal, Izquierdo perpetuated a public campaign against what she called a “monopoly” in Mexican painting. This monopoly rendered virtually impossible the ability for artists outside of "*La Santísima Trinidad*," as she irreverently referred to Rivera, Orozco and Siqueiros, to make a real name for themselves.[76] She reviled their perceived and undeserved claim to the "invention" of *mexicanidad*. Izquierdo implored the public "to think about this: the 'Three Greats' have under their control all Mexican mural production – the Church in the hands of Luther – and they will pass judgment, from their omnipotent position, who serves and who doesn't serve in painting murals. Marvelous!"[77] As a woman who was actively cultivating her fame – indeed, her very icon status – Izquierdo coveted this high-profile mural commission. She was certainly a well known artist in Mexico's cultural circles; and she made sure that the general public knew her name, too. But there is a difference between being well known and being famous; only a mural commission could secure the level of cultural fame for which she hungered.

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[72] “Que lo de la ‘junta secreta’ es un infundio absurdo. Yo propuse que en el caso de María Izquierdo, como en el de otro mural, fueran los pintores que tuvieran más experiencia en la pintura correspondiente (pintura mural) quienes ayudaran a María Izquierdo, como a cualquier otro pintor, a realizar su obra definitiva.” Statement from Siqueiros quoted in “Alfaro Siqueiros Aclara el Incidente con María Izquierdo,” *Excelsior*, 25 Jul 1946.

[73] Izquierdo’s exhibition of the mural panels in her home was publicized in several newspapers, including “Exposición de María Izquierdo,” *La Prensa Gráfica*, 23 May 1946; and “Murales de María Izquierdo: fueron exhibidos en el domicilio de la propia artista,” *Novedades*, 24 May 1946.

[74] Anna Indych-López, *Muralism without Walls: Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros in the United States, 1927-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

[75] Lozano, 51.

In fact, Izquierdo was not alone in her sentiments about the muralists' excessive domination of the Mexican art scene. When in 1947 Diego Rivera announced the organization of a committee in defense in mural painting, several voices rose up against the idea. Rufino Tamayo stated to the press that Mexican painting was decadent, and lamented the low creative point of the Mexican mural movement.[78] Not to be outdone, David Alfaro Siqueiros responded sharply and publicly to each of his accusers, and clarified his stance about Tamayo and other pursuers of Pure Art, "the most serious form of deviation within the art movement of today," at a lecture at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in December of 1947: "Many people believe that everything will be solved by condemning what they call the 'monopoly of the big three,'… But neither my colleagues nor the art critics will get anywhere unless they produce better ideas and a better plan than ours."[79]

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[76] Izquierdo developed a long, scathing, and sarcastic argument against "The Most Holy Trinity" of muralists in María Izquierdo, "María Izquierdo vs. Los Tres Grandes" *El Nacional*, Mexico, D.F., 2 Oct 1947, Sec. 2, 1, 4.

[77] "Hay que pensar en esto: los "tres grandes" tienen bajo su control – la Iglesia en manos de Lutero – toda la producción mural mexicana y dictaminarán, desde su omnimoda posición quién sirve y quién no sirve para pintar murales. ¡Maravilloso!..." In this article, Izquierdo also challenged her colleague at La Esmeralda, Frida Kahlo. Despite Izquierdo's hard work through her career, it was Kahlo who won a circle of devoted students, commonly known as "los Fridos." Her public protest against the muralists' monopoly on Mexican painting in 1947 betrayed some of her feelings about Kahlo at this time, referring to "the absolute control she exercises" over her "little group of students" as being an exact replica of her husband Diego and the "commission" of the muralists at large. Ibid., 1, 4.

It might be assumed that the collective of voices alternative to the aims of the Muralists, including so esteemed an artist as Rufino Tamayo, would have served as support for Izquierdo's case, but Izquierdo's public debate ultimately backfired. Luis-Martín Lozano cites a number of flagrant articles published at this time with headlines like "Tormenta sobre María Izquierdo" and "Escándolo Artístico" constituting a systematic campaign to discredit the artist. One author wrote, in thinly veiled gender discriminatory language, that "María Izquierdo is not a muralist, she is an outsider in this branch of painting, she does not have the right to take over functions that do not pertain to her."[80]

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[78] Lozano, 51.

[79] David Alfaro Siqueiros, "The Historical Process of Modern Mexican Painting (Outline of a lecture on December 10th, 1947, at the Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City)," in David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Art and Revolution* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 14, 17.

[80] Quoted in Lozano, 49. Lozano cites original source: *Revista Nosotros*, Jan 1946. ACCAC.

It is evident that Izquierdo's gender played a role in the fate of the mural project, but it was not often said in so many words at the time.[81] In the wake of the withdrawal of the commission, Izquierdo retreated somewhat from her previously outspoken stance on gender inequality; already in a vulnerable position, she perhaps sensed that this argument would not help her case. Rather, her indictments of the muralists focused on *their* monopoly over the genre rather than on *her* gender.

To be clear, Izquierdo was not hiding behind the monopoly comments to avoid bringing up the issue of gender. Izquierdo could not change her gender or the way that society perceived her, but as a mature artist, she could attempt to shake the foundations of the muralist agenda both in paint and in print. Her indictment of the muralists was brave and risky – indeed, she lost a lot of professional ground in pursuit of her argument. Although her track record before the scandal evinces that she went to great lengths to achieve an important mural commission, she was not willing to sacrifice her principles in the process. The fact that she did not waver from her creative plans and did not give in to the coercion of Siqueiros and Rivera prove that she would not compromise herself to keep it. At least one newspaper columnist recognized the merit and valor in Izquierdo's strong stance against the muralists. In a very brief op-ed piece in 1948, Ruben Salazar Mallen wrote: "María, as you know, enjoys great respect, because in spite of being a woman, she was more of a man than the painters who reverently bowed to the tyranny of the 'Three Greats.'"[82]

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[81] Scholars have been conservative in making this claim as well, with the notable exception of Robin Greeley's article, cited above. Also, in his catalogue essay, José Pierre suggests that Siqueiros and Rivera sensed in Izquierdo's mural sketches her rejection of patriarchy. José Pierre, "Situación de María Izquierdo dentro de la pintura mexicana," in *María Izquierdo* (1988), 24.

For years, and like so many women artists of the twentieth century, Izquierdo walked a thin line between passionate advocacy for social equality for women and protecting herself from the stigmatized label of "feminist." She was stuck, oppressed by a patriarchal system in which she also needed to participate and excel. She mediated her pleas for fair and equal treatment of women in relationships, the home and the workplace with denouncements of boastful, man-hating feminists who "have not conquered anything for humanity nor for themselves, and instead of helping women grow (who for so many years have been slaves to everything) they get in the way of emancipation."[83] "I am not a feminist of the classical type," Izquierdo elaborated in 1950, "I am not one of those who believes that the future world should be governed and managed by women only; nor do I go along with the spinster feminists who hate men; I am very far from these two types."[84] Such statements by Izquierdo have called into question the depth and spirit of her commitment to change, evidence to some scholars of a lukewarm stance on

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[82] 'María, como se sabe, goza de una gran estimación, porque a pesar de ser mujer, tuvo más pantalones que los pintores que se inclinaron reverentemente ante la tiranía de los "tres grandes."' Ruben Salazar Mallen, "¡Esta Metrópoli…!" *Ultimas Noticias de Excelsior*, 12 Jun 1948.

[83] "Creo que las feministas no han conquistado nada para la humanidad ni para ellas, y que en vez de ayudar al engrandecimiento de la mujer (por tantos años esclava de todo) entorpecen su emancipación." Radio broadcast conference dictated by María Izquierdo, "La mujer y el arte mexicano," July 1939. Quoted in Lozano, 46-47.

[84] "Yo no soy feminista tipo clásico; no soy de esas que creen que el mundo del futuro debe estar gobernado y manejado por mujeres solamente; tampoco voy con las feministas solteronas que odian el hombre; estoy muy lejos de estos dos tipos." María Izquierdo, "Carta a las mujeres de México."

women's issues that are best left out of an analysis of her art. Luis-Martín Lozano views statements like these as grounds to curtail discussion of Izquierdo as a feminist, or pursuant any sort of feminist agenda in her art.[85] But her anti-feminist rhetoric clearly focused on segments of women with whom she was at theoretical odds, and should not, as Lozano argues, negate the centrality that women's issues held in Izquierdo's public life and in her painting of the 1940s, nor disqualify Izquierdo's painting from a feminist analysis. Izquierdo's connection to feminist issues was complex, not irrelevant; although she did not call herself a feminist, she still pursued and argued for many of its issues.

The loss of the mural commission and the scandal that followed preoccupied Izquierdo for years to come. She and reporters revisited the issue over and over again in the press, and with the passage of years she grew more confident in aligning the event with her gender. In an interview in 1952, the year before suffrage for women at the national level was finally achieved, Izquierdo stated: "I think also in this governmental period I will have more understanding and support, since President Ruíz Cortínes has promised women the same rights as men in politics and culture. Now I don't think anyone today would have to endure the kind of injustice that I suffer. It seems that it will no longer be a crime to be born a woman."[86]

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[85] Lozano is not an advocate for viewing Izquierdo's work in feminist terms. He wrote, "In some essays about women painters in Mexico there is an insistent approach with extremely feminist criteria that at times distorts the facts that relate to their artistic careers. Under such perspective, painters often become ideological symbols of feminism, and this was not always the case. … For this reason I feel compelled to explain the position that María Izquierdo had in this respect in order to avoid any future Manichean ideas about her painting and ideology." Lozano, 45-46. Lozano correctly points out that Izquierdo did not want to be tagged with the label of "feminist" and the extreme political viewpoint associated with it, but this does not constitute grounds to dismiss Izquierdo's commitment to women's issues; her stance on gender politics was progressive, unwavering, and to the growth and improvement of the condition of women. Further, these ideas to bear forth in her paintings. Her focus was not, as Lozano argues, merely along the lines of "self-improvement." Ibid., 47.

CONCLUSION

The story of María Izquierdo during the 1940s is one of an aggressive and tireless crafting of a cultural star. In this decade, Izquierdo's career, moving into its mature phase, really took shape. She was well known as an artist, built good name recognition, and produced and sold a considerable amount of work. In the 1940s, Izquierdo moved from her role as a darling of the avant-garde to a more mainstream cultural participant. Though some have viewed this shift as evidence of Izquierdo "selling out," it must be recognized that the notoriety and stability that she gained in the 1940s afforded Izquierdo more, if not absolute, control over her role as a key player in Mexican art and society. Izquierdo endeavored to make herself a household name, much like "Rivera," "Siqueiros," or "Orozco."

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[86] "Pienso también en este periodo gubernamental tendré más comprensión y ayuda, ya que el Presidente de la República Sr. Don Adolfo Ruíz Cortínes, ha prometida a la mujer los mismos derechos que al hombre en la política y en la cultura. Creo que ya a nadie se le hará en la actualidad una injusticia como la que yo sufro. Parece ser que ya no será un delito nacer mujer." "María Izquierdo, Víctima del Monopolio Muralista," *D.F.*, 7 Dec 1952. Later in the same interview, when asked what she thought Diego Rivera should do now, Izquierdo, in a creative twist of gendered expectations, suggested that Rivera would do well to stay in the home and be the caretaker for his sick wife, Frida. "Creo que ya Diego Rivera debiera retirarse a descansar ya, ha hecho mucho. Tal vez demasiado. …podría por ejemplo en la paz de su casa dedicarse a catalogar sus ídolos y a cuidar a la gran pintora Frida Kahlo que mucho lo necesita por que esta enferma."

In the literature that relays the event, the “mural scandal” has been treated as a postscript in Izquierdo’s biography or as a blemish on an otherwise successful career. Izquierdo is sympathized with as a victim of misfortune, rather than understood as having presented a concerted, albeit unsuccessful, attempt to shift the terms of Mexican muralism and speak out against dogmatic and domineering program of the Trés Grandes. My aim is to contextualize the attainment and the loss of the mural commission within the gender politics of Mexican society, Mexican muralism, and art history. In many respects, Izquierdo was ahead of her time, paving the way for the next generation who, at more of a distance from the muralists, could rebuke the fathers – and mothers – of Mexican modern art.

EPILOGUE

La Ruptura of María Izquierdo

The late period of Izquierdo's career was undermined by poor health. In February of 1948, Izquierdo suffered a stroke that compromised the right side of her body. Her ill health did not stop her from painting, but it did hinder her productivity; in the seven years following the stroke, Izquierdo painted just over twenty paintings. In 1950, she had a second stroke, this one more serious than the first, and she endured yet another stroke in 1952. In August of 1953, Izquierdo divorced her husband Raúl Uribe, whom she accused of using her name in business deals while she was ill. María Izquierdo died of an embolism on December 2, 1955, at the age of 53.[1]

This dissertation illuminates Izquierdo's persistent commitment to the expression of issues of femininity, modernity, religious experience, and nationalism in her painting, taking an in-depth look at the recurrent religious motifs of domestic altars, the Virgin Mary, and related imagery, particularly concentrated between the years 1940 to 1945. I have endeavored to reveal Izquierdo's concerted efforts, via her active participation in the public eye and the art market, to build her professional status and fame as a female modern artist. Her creative and promotional labors culminated in a prized, government-commissioned mural, a genuine marker of artistic credence in Mexico in the post-

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[1] *María Izquierdo*, 1988, 359-364.

Revolutionary era. Even though the robust Mexican mural movement of the 1920s and 1930s can be said to have lost some of its force by the 1940s, the medium still represented a pillar of Mexican modernism, and for the most part, high-profile murals remained the domain of a select few men. Izquierdo's attainment and subsequent loss of the commission compromised her goals of incorporating representations of women in this arena of the cultural narrative and of breaking the glass ceiling as a female artist.

The retraction of the mural project, and Izquierdo's subsequent public outcries against *Los Trés Grandes*, was a significant blow to Izquierdo's career and reputation. Luis-Martín Lozano acknowledges that the years that followed the withdrawn commission were especially difficult ones for Izquierdo. He examines the years 1946-1947 as "years of depression and creativity" for Izquierdo, a time in which she was rebounding from the traumatic mural scandal while also producing some of the finest works of her career.[2]

In the years immediately following the mural commission, Izquierdo's subject matter shifted. Her production of home altars and Madonnas, which were definitive of her work in the first half of the 1940s, significantly and abruptly tapered off. Meanwhile, her creation of inventive still lifes and striking landscapes increased, merging the universal, metaphysical qualities of her work of the 1930s and the bright palette and expressive qualities of things Mexican that distinguished her work of the early 1940s. This change represents a rekindling of the vanguard ideas that inspired her work since the late 1920s, but this shift is also worth exploring in connection to the lost mural commission. I argue that the changes in subject matter and formal strategies in Izquierdo's work after 1945 constitute a deliberate distancing of her art from that of the Muralists.

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[2] See the section of text titled "Años de depresión y de creatividad" in Luis-Martín Lozano, *María Izquierdo: Una verdadera pasión por el color* (México, City: Americo Arte Editores: Landucci Editores: CONACULTA, 2002), 51-57. "Como construcciones visuales, los óleos de 1946 y 1947 son de lo mejor que María Izquierdo hubiera llegado a producir en su prolífica carrera." Ibid., 51.

SELF-PORTRAITURE

Noticeably, Izquierdo's production of self-portraits as feminine Mexican archetypes – Madonnas and regional types in particular – drops off in the years 1946-1947. The concrete, legible, meaning-laden Mexicanist icons do not hold a relevant a place in this phase of her work. In fact, her self-portraits, which were a dominant subject of her painting between 1940 and 1945, decrease overall, and those that she does paint have a noticeably dark feel to them. Her 1946 self-portrait (fig. 3.25) – in which she is dressed in a traditional black shirt; her hair is braided and drawn up in green, red, and ochre fabrics; and she is armored in large silver jewelry – portrays the artist as a virtual monument of Mexican-ness. Izquierdo's gaze is icy, stoic, and direct. The bust portrait is very tightly cropped, producing a sense of compression that heightens the intensity of the painting. The painting amounts to a pictorial defense to backlash produced by her public statements against the Muralists during this period.

Another self-portrait from 1947 (fig. 5.1) likewise has a somber feel. Luis-Martín Lozano describes the figure as having an icy expression and absent look in her unhappy, black eyes.[3] Her posture, similar to the 1946 self-portrait, is square, rigid, and bears an emotional heaviness. Vertically, the composition is tightly cropped, as Izquierdo's shoulders nearly meet the edges of the frame, allowing only a hint of ground and horizon line. However, with her face nearly centered in the composition, Izquierdo allows much of the canvas to be dedicated to the sky. Turning away from the wispy clouds and bright blue sky of *Maternidad*, 1944 (fig. 3.1), Izquierdo instead portrays herself before an ominous backdrop of dark, tempestuous sky of "intense indigos that accentuate grief and sorrow,"[4] the likes of which tended to appear over and over in her landscape painting after 1945.

Izquierdo's most haunting self-portrait is captured in *Sueño y presentimiento (Dream and Premonition)* of 1947 (fig. 5.2). As the story is told, the painting depicts the premonition that came to Izquierdo in a dream; the painting did indeed precede a stroke that would seriously compromise Izquierdo's health in February of the following year.

Sueño y presentimiento presents a complex subject and synthesizes many elements of her oeuvre. As depicted in other landscapes of this time, barren trees and an ominous sky cast a foreboding air around a simple abode drawn in sharp, elongated perspective. Adriana Zavala notes that this and other such landscapes by Izquierdo "are in clear dialogue with José Clemente Orozco's frightening landscapes of the 1920s," and engage ideas of national trauma,[5] as seen in Orozco's *La casa blanca* (*The White House*),

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[3] Lozano, *Una verdadera pasión por el color,* 52.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Zavala credits Robin Greeley with this observation. Adriana Zavala, *Un Arte Nuevo: El Aporte de María Izquierdo/A New Art: The Contribution of María Izquierdo* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2008), 76.

1925-28 (fig. 5.3). From a window, Izquierdo, with her hair drawn up and a somber expression on her face, holds outward in her hand her own decapitated head, from which long locks of hair snake into the roots of floating trees from which mask-like faces hang. The bodies of smaller, more simplified figures run from the scene, one headless, others cut off at the torso. Teresa del Conde points out that the severed head is a frequent iconographic motif in Izquierdo's work,[6] such as in *Alegoría a la libertad*, 1937 (fig. 1.20); the mannequin heads in *Trigo crecido*, 1940 (fig. 2.9) and *El gato sabio*, 1943 (fig. 2.11); and even the sugar skull in the Day of the Dead *Altar de Muertos*, 1943 (fig. 2.4).

The painting connects to Izquierdo's Virgin Mary images via the theme of self-sacrifice, though the allusions in her earlier canvases to women's sacrifices for her family and community are graphically reinterpreted in this violent context. As in the *retablo* images of the Virgin Mary in her altar series, the disembodied head sheds white milky tears and conveys an expression of intense suffering. The numerous tears even drip from her long locks of hair, and transform into leaves as they pull toward the blue cross below the window niche. Two red flowers are suspended next to each image of Izquierdo – one is shed in with the tears and leaves, and one still grows on the tree to the right of the window – suggestive of a rose, which is a symbol of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

With its direct connection to a dream, *Sueño y presentimiento* asserts the possibility of the influence of Surrealism in Izquierdo's work during this phase of her career. Several scholars have explored and contested Izquierdo's engagement with the

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[6] Teresa del Conde, "Introduction: A Nostalgic Melancholy," in *María Izquierdo, 1902-1955*, 9.

Surrealist movement.[7] Many factors contribute to the understanding of Izquierdo's work as influenced by Surrealism, such as Izquierdo's affinity for the metaphysical works of de Chirico; Antonin Artaud's enthusiasm for Izquierdo's work in 1936; and the wave of Surrealist artistic activity that Andre Breton and Wolfgang Paalin ushered into Mexico around 1940. On the other hand, Izquierdo's lack of engagement with the movement is also apparent. Notably, unlike many of her contemporaries, she was not included in the 1940 Surrealist Exposition in Mexico. "Surrealism was likely an important stimulus to her work," writes Elizabeth Ferrer. "Indeed, in its absence there would have been a much more limited artistic and philosophical context for the analysis and appreciation of her work, especially since her career coincided with the flourishing of the all-dominant

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[7] Dawn Ades contextualized Izquierdo's work in the Surrealist movement in "Orbits of the Savage Moon: Surrealism and the Representation of the Female Subject in Mexico and Postwar Paris," in *Mirror Images: Women, Surrealism, and Self-Representation*, Whitney Chadwick, ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998), 106-125. Terri Geis explores Izquierdo's contact with the movement in depth in "The voyaging reality: María Izquierdo and Antonin Artaud, Mexico and Paris." *Papers of Surrealism* 4 (Winter 2005): 1-12. In the most recent catalogue of Izquierdo's works in the collection of the Museo Universitario Andrés Blaisten, a group of paintings are organized under the heading "Surrealist Tendencies"; see Zavala, *Un Arte Nuevo: El Aporte de María Izquierdo/A New Art: The Contribution of María Izquierdo.* Adriana Zavala clearly delineates Izquierdo's connection to Surrealism, vis a vis her relationships with Los Contemporáneos and Antonin Artaud, in *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition: Women, Gender and Representation in Mexican Art* (Penn State University Press, 2010), 218-231.

On the other hand, Luis-Martín Lozano intercepts any inclination on the part of the observer to connect *Dream and Presentiment* to Izquierdo's participation in the Surrealist movement: "The subject is a subconscious expression (which does not make it surrealistic), worked out from a dream that tormented her…" Lozano, "Regarding Modern Mexican Painting: María Izquierdo (1902-1955)," in *María Izquierdo, 1902-1955* (Chicago: Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, 1996), 54. Teresa del Conde posed that Izquierdo and Kahlo were more Freudian than they were Surrealist. See Teresa del Conde, "Freudismo, Surrealismo, Metafísica, Su absorción en México," in *Modernidad y modernización en el arte mexicano: 1920-1960* (Mexico City: Museo Nacional de Arte, INBA, 1991), 115.

Mexican school. Ultimately, the actual significance of Surrealism to Izquierdo is ambiguous."[8] The Surrealists who congregated or were exiled in Mexico in the 1940s opened a sphere in an art world dominated by a social realist perspective in which more nontraditional modes of thought could be entertained, and it is likely that Izquierdo found attractive certain aspects of the movement. However, I believe it is accurate to argue Izquierdo was more directly engaged in related theories of metaphysical art, which informed her work on the 1930s, and tenets of *arte puro*, which in the 1940s posed a resistance to the artistic aims of the Muralists. In making art more closely connected to characteristics of the vanguard, Izquierdo strategically distanced herself from the Muralists in the second half of the 1940s.

LIVING STILL LIFE AND THE METAPHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

Throughout her career, Izquierdo was attracted to the still life genre as a conveyer of national, cultural, religious, and gender identities. After 1945, she continued to explore the expressive potential of still life, moving her tableau of foodstuffs and popular objects from indoor settings to the outdoors. According to Elizabeth Ferrer, "in terming many of these paintings *naturalezas vivas* ("living" still life), a word play on the Spanish *naturaleza muerta* (literally, "dead nature"), she suggested the pleasure she derived from depicting organic elements, as well as how fruits, vegetables, and other foods embodied life, fertility, and sensuality for the artist."[9] Recalling the absent portrait of a modern Mexican woman suggested in her still life tableau *El gato sabio* (*The Wise Cat*), 1943 (fig. 2.11), *Naturaleza viva* (*Living Still Life*) of 1946 (fig. 5.4) likewise conjures a feminine presence. The ripe, fleshy fruits, the undulating curves of the pink conch shell and glass pitcher, and the egg are all frank suggestions of female genitalia, sexuality, and fertility. Off of the table and out of the house, Izquierdo locates this absent portrait on the earth, reinforcing the notion of women's innate connection to nature. The sensuous bounty of *Naturaleza viva* occupies substantial foreground space, and is set against an expansive, barren landscape and architecture that lacks any suggestion of human presence. The contrast between foreground and background is striking. The large-scale, lush still life and bleak landscape charge the painting with a distinct tension. Indeed, Izquierdo's paintings dealing with gender identity typically elicit friction between two conflicting forces. Her altar series, for example, evokes the beauty of religious ritual and cultural tradition while it also serves as a reminder of the conventions that bound women to their domestic sphere.

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[8] Elizabeth Ferrer, "María Izquierdo," in *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1993), 119-120.

It is in Izquierdo's still life and landscape paintings that the influence of the modern Italian painter Giorgio de Chirico (1888-1978) is most evident. Around 1910, de Chirico founded a metaphysical art movement, representing visionary worlds beyond physical reality. His paintings became known in Mexico by the late 1920s, as several of his paintings were reproduced in the August 1928 issue of *Contemporáneos*.[10] Izquierdo also likely encountered his works during her own visits to New York in 1930 and Paris in 1937.[11] De Chirico's paintings of the 1910s captivated the French Surrealists, and also inspired several Mexican artists of Izquierdo's generation. *The Song of Love*, 1914 (fig. 5.5) exemplifies de Chirico's inventive juxtaposition of objects, placed in an unexpected location and in an exaggerated scale, these elements were explored by Izquierdo and Rufino Tamayo in the early 1930s, as seen in Izquierdo's *El teléfono (The Telephone)*, 1931 (fig. 1.2) and Tamayo's *Naturaleza muerta con pie (Still Life with Foot)*, 1928 (fig. 1.1).

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[9] Elizabeth Ferrer, "A Singular Path: The Artistic Development of María Izquierdo," in *The True Poetry: The Art of María Izquierdo* (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1997), 25.

[10] Ibid., 24.

The horses and classical themes that populated de Chirico's canvases also appeared in Izquierdo's work, as in *Dos mujeres, dos caballos y columnas* (*Two Women, Two Horses, and Columns*), 1932 (fig. 1.3), and many other gouache and watercolor paintings in the 1930s. Later, in the 1940s, when Izquierdo began producing less traditional landscapes, the inspiration of de Chirico on the artist became more pronounced. De Chirico's scenes of eerie, deserted towns and piazzas grew more haunted through his employment of exaggerated perspective. The blank wall that runs along the right side of Izquierdo's *Naturaleza viva* canvas, originating in the foreground of the canvas and extending into the horizon, manipulates lines of two dimensional perspective in such a way that skews observed reality, not unlike de Chirico's use of the technique in *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street*, 1914 (fig. 5.6). Izquierdo's *Naturaleza viva con huachinango* (*Living Still Life with Red Snapper*), 1946 (fig. 5.7) also uses sharp perspective lines, located in the power lines that stretch into an infinite distance, to impart a sense of vastness. At the same time, this measureless landscape is rendered diminutive in comparison to the large scale of the vibrant still life that consumes the tabletop in the foreground of the composition. Distortions of scale and perspective collide to produce a way of seeing through the mind's eye.

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[11] Dore Ashton, "Surrealism and Latin America," in *Latin American Artists of the Twentieth Century*, 112.

As the 1940s progressed, and the economy grew, the industrial age began to drastically transform Mexico. James Oles explains that as the country underwent a dramatic topical and ideological shift, idyllic images of a rural, traditional world became attractive to Mexican collectors who, in the 1940s, began to play an important role in Mexico's art market.[12] Since the nineteenth century in Mexico, artists like José María Velasco (1840-1912) have grappled with the implications of modernization on the natural world and, by extension, on the people who inhabit it. Connecting to her predecessors, to her milieu, and again to de Chirico's "anxiety over the escalation of modernization,"[13] Izquierdo's *Naturaleza viva con huachinango* depicts a cross-section of the natural, the hand-made, and the man-made. Illustrating the work of one's hands, a delicate lace covers half of the table, and a paring knife, teetering on the edge of the table, is the tool that sliced the avocados, cheese, lemon, and eggs. This humble labor is juxtaposed with the industrial, marked by the poles from which an infinite string of power lines are suspended. Replacing tree lines, the poles rival the heights and the range of the mountains around them. But the most majestic of element of the painting is of the natural world, the large red snapper that lies near the center of the composition.

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[12] James Oles, "Colecciones disueltas: sobre unos extranjeros y muchos cuadros mexicanos," in *Patrocinio, colección y circulación de las artes: XX Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1997), 624.

[13] Ferrer, "A Singular Path: The Artistic Development of María Izquierdo," 24.

Izquierdo's experimentation with metaphysical ideas set forth by de Chirico and elaborated by her Mexican contemporaries was not contained only to her landscapes. For Izquierdo, the window was a key motif that allowed her to convey a sense of metaphysical reality. As I examine in Chapter Two, she first featured the window in her still life *La raqueta (The Racquet)*, 1938 (fig. 2.10) as a way to challenge one's sense of place, conjure a new dimension of consciousness, and transcend boundaries of interior and exterior. The same principle informs Izquierdo's series of home altar *ofrendas,* which act as a spiritual portal to those to whom the altars are dedicated. The framed *retablo* paintings of the *Mater Dolorosa*, usually situated on the canvas in a similar position to her window motif, offers to the worshipper a view of the Virgin Mary and, in a sense, a view into the eternal life in which she exists. This possibility is reinforced in later canvases, such as *La Alacena (Viernes de Juguetería)*, (*Cabinet (Toy Store Friday)*), 1952 (fig. 2.12); the title of this cabinet painting is a play on her similarly titled *Friday of Sorrows* altars. In this niche, shelved space, the *retablo* is replaced by a window onto distant horizon. At the same time, there is a crucial difference between Izquierdo's *Naturaleza viva* paintings and the home altars, *alacenas*, and table-top still life paintings that she produced. The tightly cropped, domestic spaces – only some of which contain small windows hinting at a world beyond the frame – are freed of their formally compressed compositions and released into a vast landscape. The difference between these bodies of work illuminates Izquierdo's deliberate construction of domestic spaces in order to evoke the sense of constraint imposed by traditional gender roles.

One of her final paintings before her death, *Hacia el paraíso* (*Toward Paradise*), 1954 (fig. 5.8) most acutely describes Izquierdo's expressive intention for the window motif. A small fire burns in a depleted landscape, and above the fire, suspended in the soft blue sky, is a window. The construction of the sill mimics those she created since their first appearance in *La raqueta*; defying visual perception and tricks of two dimensional expressions of three dimensional reality, all four sides of the sill are measured in equal perspective. The broadness of the windowsill suggests a tunnel, which reaches deep into a distance, suggested by the tiny opening at its end. The very presence of the window in a broad, open sky is disorienting, asserting a spatial disjunction between two separate but adjacent worlds and heightening a sense of metaphysicality. Izquierdo applied extremely thick coats of oils to build up the surface of the painting, making the image highly textural and formally progressive and modern.[14]

Izquierdo achieved a remarkable level of spatial disorientation in *Naturaleza viva con calabezas (Living Still Life with Squashes)* of 1947 (fig. 5.9). Distinctions between interior and exterior, ethereal and material, dissolve in this composition. Another large-scale table-top still life consumes the foreground of the composition, with robust squashes, eggs, green onion, and a red snapper. The still life is situated in an interior setting; beyond the table is a wall with exposed brick and a window view onto a disjointed, stark townscape and a dark sky. But the adjoining wall that frames the right side of the composition begins to break down the certainty of the interior; this wall is painted like a cloudy sky, and it meets a floor that is of the same earthy, textural brown that is depicted in the townscape. A small sphere overlapping the floor (or ground) and wall (or sky) asserts the idea of the sphere as a globe, a representation of the earth. Is the window, then, really a window that looks out onto an exterior world, or could it be a mirror image of an exterior space in which the still life resides? Or is this neither window nor mirror, but rather a painting within a painting, like the *retablos* found in Izquierdo's altars? The spatial ambiguity of *Naturaleza viva con calabezas* makes it, in the words of Luis-Martín Lozano, "in a strict sense, a painting with metaphysical implications," and "one of María Izquierdo's paintings with the most pure aesthetic: there's no anecdote, no history, there doesn't seem to be a place for personal mindset references…."[15] In this canvas and others of this time, Izquierdo gravitates to visual expressions that might be categorized as a move towards an *arte puro*, a "pure art."

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[14] Lozano notes that after her strokes, her palette changes and her technical application of oil paint is radical. Izquierdo painted about twenty paintings after her first stroke. Lozano, *Una verdadera pasión por el color,* 57.

A PURE ART

Since the inception of her artistic career in the late 1920s, Izquierdo was immersed in the vibrant dialogue and exchange of ideas about modern art in Mexico. Though the social realist agenda of the major figures of muralism has dominated the spotlight of Mexican art history, theirs was by no means the singular voice of modernism.

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[15] "…el cual es, en sentido estricto, un cuadro con implicaciones metafísicas, pues posee un tratamiento espacial que lo convierte en uno de los cuadros de María Izquierdo con mayor purismo estético: no hay anécdota, no hay historia, no parece haber lugar para las referencias anímicas personales y sí, en cambio, un sentido de evasión dimensional en el contrito paisaje que se descubre a través de la ventana." Lozano, *Una verdadera pasión por el color,* 52. Lozano identifies the framed landscape view in this painting as a window.

Mexico City's art circles were charged with a deep consideration and heated debates about the ideal course that Mexican modern art – an art with central concerns of nationalism while also examining its relationship to Western modernist activity – should follow. Travel abroad exposed Mexico's artists to a range of modern trends, and a variety of aesthetic philosophies and images were reproduced and disseminated in Mexican journals.

When Izquierdo's work was shown at the Galería de Arte Moderno in November of 1929, she entered the ranks of Mexico City's vanguard. A newspaper article from that time, written by Gustavo Ortiz Hernán and discussed by Adriana Zavala in the catalogue *Un Arte Nuevo: El Aporte de María Izquierdo*, located Izquierdo in the tendency of "pure art" alongside the likes of Rufino Tamayo.[16] The critic Ortiz Hernán made clear the distinction between "pure art" and another important tenet in contemporary Mexican art, "social art." Associated with Diego Rivera, "social art" considered art as a "continuation of life"; this "collectivist" artform strove to serve of the proletariat and to "be in the streets." "Pure art," on the other hand, was "dehumanized,"[17] a free expression rather than a form of social service. Zavala continues to summarize Ortiz Hernán's definition of "pure art":

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[16] Zavala cites a newspaper clipping found in the María Izquierdo Archive, Collection of Aurora Posadas Izquierdo, which probably appeared in *El Nacional*. Gustavo Ortiz Hernán, "Crónicas de Arte: La Galería de Arte Moderno," quoted in Adriana Zavala, *Un Arte Nuevo: El Aporte de María Izquierdo/A New Art: The Contribution of María Izquierdo* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2008), 32-33.

[17] Zavala explains that in this context, the term "dehumanized" is a reference from a widely read book by José Ortega y Gassett of 1925. All quotations to this point indicate Zavala's direct quotations from Ortiz Hernán's article. Ibid., 32.

> "Pure art" was not defined by an interpretation of life. Instead, creative imagination transformed experience, producing a "dense dream" and a "cerebral adventure." According to the critic, the end goal of "pure art" was visual pleasure, and the artistic imagination produced the experience of traveling to distant lands. If "social art" was "of the street," "pure art" was "of the studio,"… [Ortiz Hernán's words in quotations][18]

Indeed, Izquierdo's oeuvre of the 1930s, filled with elusive allegories, mystical references, modernist juxtapositions of objects, and fantastic circus scenes, is accurately characterized in this vein. As this dissertation has discussed, around 1940, Izquierdo segued into new visual strategies, as her palette grew much more colorful and brighter, her affinity to tangible Mexican artifacts increased, and self-portraits abounded. I have argued that this pictorial shift worked in tandem with shifts in strategies of her career in relation to the art market; positing herself as a female artist who was both authentically traditional and modern; advancing her fame and broad appeal; and her desire to gain a mural commission. The shifts in her painting also represented Izquierdo's steps into aspects of so-called "social art," an art that concerned itself with concrete aspects of everyday Mexican experience. Through her self-portraiture, broadly legible Virgin Mary icons relayed complex notions of traditional and modern Mexican feminine identity. This is not to say that Izquierdo abandoned the "pure art" tendencies that nurtured her early career: she developed the motif of windows as an eye onto otherworldly realities; her home altars evoked ethereality; and her concern of color as a central element to her process and product of painting aligned with "pure art" concerns. But these "pure art" aspects were but some of many strategies employed in her paintings of these years, rather than a dominant creative intention. Likewise, her painting after 1945 did not abandon all of the strategies employed in her work in the 1940-45 period. Vibrant still lifes were populated with things Mexican, the Mexican landscape became a prominent theme, and notions of identity continued to be explored in self-portraiture; however, it is apparent that her concerns for the metaphysical, for the “cerebral adventure” implicit in “pure art,” significantly heightened in her work post-1945.

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[18] Ibid, 33.

Meanwhile, in the 1940s, the conflicts over the principles underlying Mexican modern art production that began in the 1920s “re-emerged in a more volatile way in the 1940s between the so-called revolutionary artists and those they termed *artepuristas*.”[19] Izquierdo’s former partner, Rufino Tamayo, fought a public battle with *Los Trés Grandes* over “pure art” versus the ideology of revolutionary art. Tamayo’s longstanding, paramount interest in color and form, in the pursuit of a “pure art,” fed an ongoing debate between Tamayo and muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros about the social role and pictorial ideal of modern Mexican art. Tamayo contended that “returning painting to its ‘pure qualities’ did not necessarily mean no subject matter or pure abstraction but rather an emphasis on technique and the act of painting.”[20] Siqueiros viewed this ideology as deviant, an attack on the rightful orientation of Mexican modern art in the political and revolutionary concerns.[21] His attitude about the direction of Mexican art was best summarized in the title of his 1945 book, *No hay más ruta que la nuestra* (*There Is Only One Route, Ours*).[22] Tamayo publicly rebutted that Mexican painting was decadent, and lamented the low creative point of the Mexican mural movement.[23]

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[19] Ibid., 32.

[20] Rufino Tamayo, “Cuál es la pintura revolucionaria?” in *Textos de Rufino Tamayo*, Raquel Tibol, ed. (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, 1987), 30.

[21] Siquieros wrote: “Meanwhile there was a new generation of Mexican painters sympathetic to our movement: Rufino Tamayo, Julio Castellanos, etc. These painters, however, stood aside from the political struggle in which we had been involved, and instead accentuated the Christian, archaeological, folk-art, essentially picturesque nature of our earlier period. Furthermore, they made the transition from murals to canvas much more directly than we had done, and became exclusively “Mexicanist” rather than

While Tamayo waged debates with Siqueiros and also Rivera, Izquierdo remained publicly engaged in her dispute with the muralists and their "monopoly" over the medium in the years after her own mural dismissal of 1945, discussed in detail in Chapter Four. Izquierdo was embittered by the humiliation of the commission withdrawal at the hands of Rivera and Siqueiros and the loss at her chance to enter the ranks of those artists immortalized in this form of public art. While she took a stand against the muralists in print, her noticeable return to more experimental forms of modern art, with less emphasis on its overt social expression, marked also a pictorial rebuttal against the muralists. In 1946-47, Izquierdo's painting shifted, gravitating again to more of a "pure art" tendency. Her work incorporated the metaphysical ideas that she had been exploring throughout her career in new ways. While her religious imagery of the previous few years incorporated ethereal possibilities, they were also overtly rooted in tangible cultural traditions. Her paintings in the years after the scandal more openly challenged social realism with vanguard ideas. Further, Izquierdo's production of domestic altars, Mexican Madonnas,

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political. They were the embryo of the Pure Art movement, the most serious form of deviation within the art movement of today…" David Alfaro Siqueiros, "The Historical Process of Modern Mexican Painting (Outline of a lecture on December 10th, 1947, at the Palace of Fine Arts, Mexico City)," in David Alfaro Siqueiros, *Art and Revolution* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1975), 14.

[22] Siqueiros, *No hay más ruta que la nuestra: importancia nacional e internacional de la pintura mexicana moderna* (Mexico: Secretaria de Educación Publica, 1945).

[23] Lozano, "Regarding Modern Mexican Painting: María Izquierdo (1902-1955)," 51.

and repetitive self-imaging rather abruptly tapered off after the scandal, in comparison to the concentration of this imagery in the period of 1940-1945.

That her subject matter evolved is not an unusual development in one's career, but its timing is worth noting. Before the granting of the mural commission, Izquierdo engaged a concerted and multilayered effort to build her public notoriety as a professional female artist, her market value, and her reputation as an authentically Mexican woman. The domestic altars and Madonna self-portraits were an effective vehicle to this end, underlining Izquierdo's own rural authenticity, adherence to cultural and religious tradition, and prominence as a female figure. After several years of trying to break into the mainstream market and figure herself as a prime candidate for a mural commission, Izquierdo actively cultivated aspects of her work that would further distance and distinguish herself from the Muralists and more closely align her production with so-called "pure art." In 1947, Izquierdo crafted an artist's credo for a catalogue to the exhibition of *45 Autorretratos de pintores mexicanos*. She concisely summarized her philosophy of painting which applied to her whole career but was particularly resonant with her output in the 1946-47 period:

> In my style and technique, I have always sought a personality distinct from other Mexican painters. I try to make my painting reflect the authentic Mexico that I feel and love; I avoid anecdotal, folkloric and political subjects because these have neither aesthetic nor poetic force and because I believe that in the world of painting, a work is a window into the human imagination. Along with this aesthetic position, I possess a true passion for color; it is what I most feel and what excites me most of all the things that exist. With these elements, the forms and colors of Mexico, I challenge myself each day to surpass my previous work and to advance my style, through the careful and patient execution of every painting.[24]

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[24] "Siempre ha sido mi propósito buscar en la técnica y en el estilo una personalidad distinta a la que tienen los demás pintores mexicanos. Me esfuerzo para que mi pintura refleje al México auténtico que siento y amo; huyo de caer en temas anecdóticos,

Izquierdo's oft repeated declaration of her avoidance of political themes and anecdotal subjects, along with the rhetoric of the primacy of color that was simultaneously argued by Tamayo, honor artistic convictions that Izquierdo held throughout her career while they also, at this critical moment, reinforce Izquierdo's position against the revolutionary agenda of the muralists.

CONCLUSION

Luis-Martín Lozano said that Izquierdo was "a true daughter of the Revolution, rather than one of those who formed a bridge to the post-Revolutionary period."[25] I agree that this distinction bears out historically in the organization of Mexican art movements, but I believe the notion of Izquierdo as a "true daughter of the Revolution" is more nuanced than Lozano suggests. Indeed, the most characteristic and persistent roots of Izquierdo style, subjects, and ideology can be traced to her development in the late 1920s and 1930s vanguard of Mexico City, but in many ways, by the 1940s, Izquierdo was

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folklóricos y políticos porque dichos temas no tienen ni fuerza plástica ni poética y pienso que en el mundo de la pintura, un cuadro es una ventana abierta a la imaginación humana. Junto a esta posición estética poseo una verdadera pasión por el color; es lo que más siento y lo que más me emociona de todas las cosas que existen. Con esos elementos, formas y colores de México, me propongo superar cada día más mis creaciones plásticas y tiendo, en cada cuadro, a perfeccionar mi técnica y a enaltecer mi estilo, dándole cada vez más importancia al paciente y laborioso acabado de un cuadro." The full catalogue entry is reprinted and translated into English in Zavala, 37.

[25] Lozano, "In Search of Our Own Modernity," *Mexican Modern Art 1900-1950*, 61.

caught between two historical moments, the post-Revolutionary period of modern Mexican art and the future generation of abstractionists.

In the 1950s, a group of young artists rebelled against the academic mode of social realist painting in Mexico. They directly confronted the Mexican School's focus on validating local and national culture, and advocated instead for non-objective painting and the internationalization of Mexican art. *La Ruptura*, or the Rupture Generation, rose to prominence between 1952 and 1965. Just one year after Izquierdo's death, in 1956, the manifesto "La Cortina de Nopal" ("The Cactus Curtain") was written by the self-taught Mexican artist José Luis Cuevas and published between 1957 and 1959 in *Novedades*.[26] Extremely controversial at the time of its original publication, the article served as a rallying call to young artists frustrated with nationalistic art. In the manifesto, Cuevas expresses his distaste for the ongoing and institutionalized brand of Mexican nationalism dominated by the likes and legacies of Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros. The manifesto chronicles the hypothetical story of Juan, a young artist in Mexico whose innate passions, talents and interests are steadily and systematically repackaged to satisfy the demands of the marketplace and to conform to a thirty year old ideology of what constitutes *lo mexicano* in the visual arts. Like Izquierdo did some ten years prior with her accusations of a muralist monopoly, Cuevas confers a scathing indictment of Mexico's numbness to and propagation of the stale, narrow, essentializing ideas of a few individuals. While Izquierdo received harsh reckoning for her public statements against the great muralists, Cuevas' manifesto, though controversial, is credited with leading the charge of a new generation of contemporary Mexican art. Though the impact of the dissent of *La Ruptura* was powerful, it was not unprecedented, and Izquierdo's efforts to expose the "monopoly" that *Los Trés Grandes* held over Mexican art should be properly contextualized and acknowledged in this art historical lineage.

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[26] The article appeared in English translation in the *Evergreen Review* in 1959.

Izquierdo received little critical attention for several decades following her death, until a large-scale rebirth of interest in her art emerged in the late 1980s. The major retrospective exhibition mounted at the Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City in 1988 brought together a comprehensive body of art works, both well known and unknown, from public and private collections. This show in particular made possible a critical reassessment of Izquierdo's oeuvre and also influenced a new generation of artists, including Nahum B. Zenil, Julio Galán, and Rocío Maldonado, whose work explores traditional Mexican themes.[27]

An examination of Izquierdo's career and artistic production in the 1940s, an understudied decade in the critical discourse about her and in Mexican art history in general, illuminates the many ways in which she managed to successfully navigate among professional and cultural forces. Izquierdo's career and her art often challenged the lines between the avant-garde and the mainstream market; between a revolutionary agenda and a changing global wartime economy; and – in terms of her gender – between traditional and progressive roles. Yet, despite the pressures she faced, she skillfully crafted a permanent place for herself and for the representation of women in the male-dominated milieu of modern Mexican art.

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[27] Zenil, Galán, and Maldonado are recognized as Neomexicanist painters, a movement that developed in the 1980s.

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