

# MEXICO

## EXPECTED / UNEXPECTED

## ACTIVITY GUIDE

In the **exhibition**, *Mexico: Expected/Unexpected*, the curators organized a display of art that belongs to Mexican collectors Isabel and Agustin Coppel. The collection contains over 1,600 pieces by artists from all over the world and ranges from traditional to **contemporary** works.

The goal of the **curators** is to defy the stereotypes that we have about Mexico and its art. They want to reveal **unexpected** images and viewpoints and make you think about it in a new way. To do this, they place Mexican art alongside non-Mexican art, highlighting their similarities and differences.

To arrange the **exhibition** in a way that makes sense to visitors, the **curators** selected **themes** they saw repeatedly in the collection. • Archive-Accumulation • Images of Death and Mortality • Constructive Logic/Geometric Abstraction.



This photo by Teresa Margolles is a good example of art that deals with “Mexican”—yet universal subject matter—in an **unexpected** way. It seems as if it is about architecture, but when we look at this photograph closely, we see that the marquee presents suicide notes and not movie features. Death is a very common subject in Mexican art, where the Day of the Dead\* is celebrated every November.



For a quick overview of the Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) tradition in Mexico, go to: [Scan the code](#) or visit <http://bit.ly/t3Q0bY>

TERESA MARGOLLES (b. 1963, Mexico) *Posthumous Notes (Avenida Movie Theatre)*, 2006, C-print, CIAC AC



### WHATS THIS ?

These boxes are called QR codes. They work like bar codes for your phone and can provide you with more information or link you to a Web site. Text **SCAN to 64631** for a free barcode reader application. Message and data rates may apply. STOP to quit.

## NEW WORDS

**Accumulate:** To gather or collect over time.

**Archive:** A collection of documents that help keep track of the past.

**Category:** Group of things put together because they have something in common.

**Conceptual Art:** Art in which the idea or concept is more important than the materials or final product.

**Collection:** A set of objects gathered by a person or organization because of their value, interest or beauty.

**Contemporary:** Belonging to the current time period.

**Curator:** Someone who organizes and chooses objects for an exhibition at a museum or gallery.

**Expected:** Predictable, typical, very likely to occur or be.

**Exhibition:** A showing of a piece, or collection of objects.

**Geometric Abstraction:** A type of art that uses geometric forms or shapes (circles, squares, etc.) arranged to create non-representational images.

**Global:** Worldwide.

**Image:** Picture or example.

**Local:** Nearby or from a specific area or region.

**Mortality:** The fact that eventually all humans die.

**Symbol:** Something that represents another thing.

**Theme:** A topic, idea or subject.

**Tradition:** A pattern, belief or custom that has been handed down from one generation to the next.

**Unexpected:** Surprising or unlikely.

The Coppel collection, like the individual pieces within it, creates a puzzle that can be organized and re-organized to tell different stories. Whether we want to trace how one generation of artists influenced another, or just examine different themes from various points of view, the Coppel collection holds valuable information as an **archive**.

While this **exhibition** contains many key pieces from the Coppel's vast **collection**, it certainly doesn't show you everything! Because it is so large, this exhibition was divided into two parts. The other half is on view at the Museum of Contemporary Art in San Diego. We hope that you can visit both museums and compare the objects found here and there. If not, you can find more information online at: <http://www.mcasd.org>

### IMAGE CREDIT FOR COVER

GRACIELA ITURBIDE (b. 1942, Mexico) *Pájaros en el poste de luz. Carretera a Guanajuato / Birds in the Light Post. Road to Guanajuato*, 1990, gelatin silver print (detail) CIAC AC

THIS EDUCATION BROCHURE IS FUNDED BY VERIZON



*Mexico: Expected/Unexpected* is a wide-ranging exhibition shown in its entirety only by its simultaneous presentation in two museums. This is the first time either museum has concurrently presented a single exhibition. While each venue presents a cohesive exhibition with strong internal logic, extraordinary artworks and site-specific programming and interpretation, MCASD and MOLAA audiences are encouraged to travel between the two locations to understand the full associations offered by the exhibition.

*Mexico: Expected/Unexpected* was originally curated by Mónica Amor with project advisor Carlos Basualdo for the Maison Rouge, Paris (2008). The MCASD and MOLAA installations are the result of a curatorial dialogue between Mireya Escalante and Ana Belén Lezana (CIAC), Lucía Sanromán (MCASD) and Cecilia Fajardo-Hill and Idurre Alonso (MOLAA).

*Mexico: Expected/Unexpected* is organized by CIAC with support from La Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, México, and the Consulado General de México in San Diego and Los Angeles.



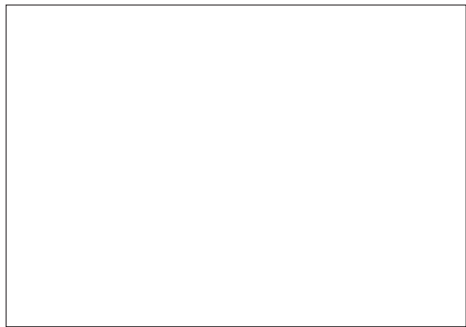
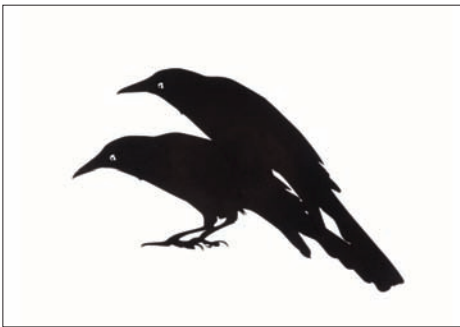
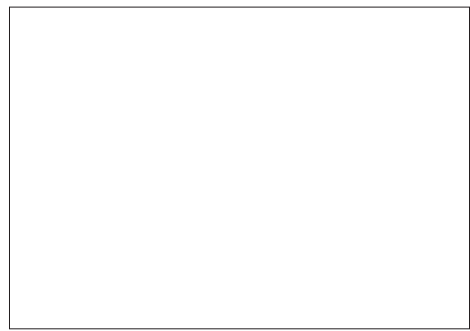
MOLAA's exhibition is presented by Wells Fargo and Thank Goodness It's Sofia. Additional support is provided by the Robert Gumbiner Foundation, Verizon, Arts Council for Long Beach, the City of Long Beach and MOLAA's Annual Exhibition Fund.



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When you think of Mexico, what do you imagine? Do you picture the beaches you see on freeway billboards advertising Mexican vacations or the “dangerous” border towns that are shown on the news? The pictures that first pop into our heads when we think about unfamiliar areas represent the **expected**—what we know. The **unexpected** are the things we have yet to discover.



CARLOS AMORALES (b. 1970, Mexico) *Panorama*, 2007, set of 30 collage paper drawings CIAC AC



## ARCHIVE-ACCUMULATION AND GROUPING

To understand and remember new facts, we learn to put objects and people into groups. You may sort people based on their role in the community, their age or the country they are from. You may sort objects based on their use, size or the order in which you collected them.

The image above is by Graciela Iturbide, a famous Mexican photographer. It shows a man from Nayarit, Mexico surrounded by

GRACIELA ITURBIDE (b. 1942, Mexico) *El Señor de los pájaros. Nayarit / Man of Birds. Nayarit*, 1985, gelatin silver print CIAC AC

birds. Because it is from a very specific time (1942) it acts as a record of a moment and place. As a part of a series, it becomes a part of an **archive**.

Carlos Amoraless is a **contemporary** artist from Mexico who uses silhouettes of everyday **symbols** that he has **accumulated** to create what he calls a “Liquid Archive.”

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**Compare this “drawing” to Iturbide’s photograph. How are they the same?**

Artists often create series of works in order to build a visual record of culture or history. They collect **contemporary** symbols that can then be looked back at historically. Look at the symbols that Amoraless uses. Are they relevant to our present experiences? Are some of them timeless?

**Activity:** Some of the squares are empty in this drawing. What images are important records of your life, culture or time? Fill them in as silhouettes. How does this change the Amoraless drawing? How does it make it **unexpected**?



MANUEL ÁLVAREZ BRAVO (1902-2002, Mexico) *Niño maya de Tulum / Mayan Child from Tulum*, 1942, photograph (detail) CIAC AC

## IMAGES OF DEATH AND MORTALITY

If you live in Los Angeles or a part of the U.S. with a large Mexican population, you are probably familiar with *Día de los Muertos* and its most important **symbol**, the *Calavera* (skeleton/skull). *Calaveras* were central to indigenous cultures who observed death as a continuation of life. The *Calavera* is a **symbol** of **mortality** and continues to be a strong part of Mexican **identity**.

This photo by Manuel Álvarez Bravo explores the idea of death through life, past and present. It shows multi-cultural influences, probably due to Álvarez Bravo’s childhood. Álvarez Bravo grew up among artists. Early on in his career he met many from across the globe like the French artist Andre Breton and **local**, Mexican artist Diego Rivera.

In, *Niño maya de Tulum*, Álvarez Bravo places a boy alongside a similarly shaped and sized ancient Maya relief. Álvarez Bravo’s piece demonstrates the interaction of past and future and life and death. By placing these two figures side by side he’s asking us to compare them.

**Examine the Photograph: Compare this photograph to the Carlos Amoraless’ drawings. Is Álvarez Bravo collecting symbols in this photograph? What symbols do you see and what do they represent?**



Although the themes and subject of *Niño maya de Tulum* are very “Mexican,” there is also an international aspect to the composition of the photograph. To learn about it, **scan the code** or visit <http://bit.ly/hilHif>



GABRIEL OROZCO (b. 1962, Mexico) *Atomists: Ascension / Atomistas: Ascensión*, 1996, 2 part computer generated print (detail) CIAC AC

## CONSTRUCTIVE LOGIC/ GEOMETRIC ABSTRACTION

So far, we have seen how Mexican artists may use traditional images in art. This section shows how artists use circles, squares and grids to create pictures that explore every day life and situations. We see how some Mexican artists are changing the way that **Geometric Abstraction** is used and can trace its roots to other Latin American and international artists.

Gabriel Orozco is a Mexican artist who is known for transforming every day situations and objects by using formal elements like geometric patterns and shapes to change their meaning. In this painting, he has taken a picture of rugby players and added colorful circles and half circles that mirror the colors and patterns found on the players’ uniforms. The uniforms and thus the athlete’s bodies, become abstracted symbols made up of colors and patterns. In this way, he blends art and life.

Before Gabriel Orozco, American born artist Gordon Matta-Clark was transforming buildings by cutting geometric patterns into them. He took art out of the museum and into our every day surroundings.



To learn more about Matta-Clark **scan the code** or visit <http://bit.ly/e9ZnEJ>



RIVANE NEUENSCHWANDER (b. 1967, Brazil) *Conversations and Constructions / Canteiros / Conversaciones y construcciones*, 2006, polptych of 16 photographs C-prints CIAC AC

Another artist who transforms everyday objects by reorganizing them is Brazilian artist Rivane Neuenschwander.

In these photographs, she **accumulates** food and household objects, like onions and toothpicks, and arranges them to create 3-dimensional mini sculptures. When you look at this series from far away, it looks like a grid. Seen from up close we see the **unexpected**, identifiable objects that make sense. You may think you are looking at one thing, but you are really looking at another. Or, maybe, you are looking at both.

**Geometric Abstraction** reminds us that artists are not always straightforward in revealing their intentions. Art can be used like a puzzle, with all of the different shapes, colors and symbols coming together to make the big picture. It’s only when we interact with art that we can make sense of it.

Artists give clues through the forms and meanings of their objects.



To figure out what artists are saying through their work, you can use the approach found at this link **scan the code** or visit <http://bit.ly/fsL7N>

## Activity: Conversation Construction (Found Object Sculpture)

Create your own series of found object sculptures using things you find around the house!

**MATERIALS:** A clean, even surface like a table or countertop. A lot of the same lightweight objects: Dry pasta, beans, clothespins, paperclips, matchbooks, pencils, Q-tips, bandages, spools of thread and sugar cubes are good items to use.

### STEPS:

**Step 1.** Collect your lightweight objects. Make sure that you have multiples of each!

**Step 2.** Before building your masterpiece, examine the objects. Pay close attention to their colors and shapes.

**Step 3.** What do you think of when you look at the objects? Keep in mind that your final sculpture does not have to look like anything in particular. It can be a pattern or grid, too.

**Step 4.** Build your sculpture by **accumulating** the objects in stacks or grids. (See if you can keep it together without using tape or glue!)

Make a series of sculptures! If you have access to a digital camera, photograph your sculptures like Rivane Neuenschwander and show them to your friends and family! What do they see? Is your intention clear?