

Lola Alvarez Bravo
In Her Own Light

Lola Alvarez Bravo

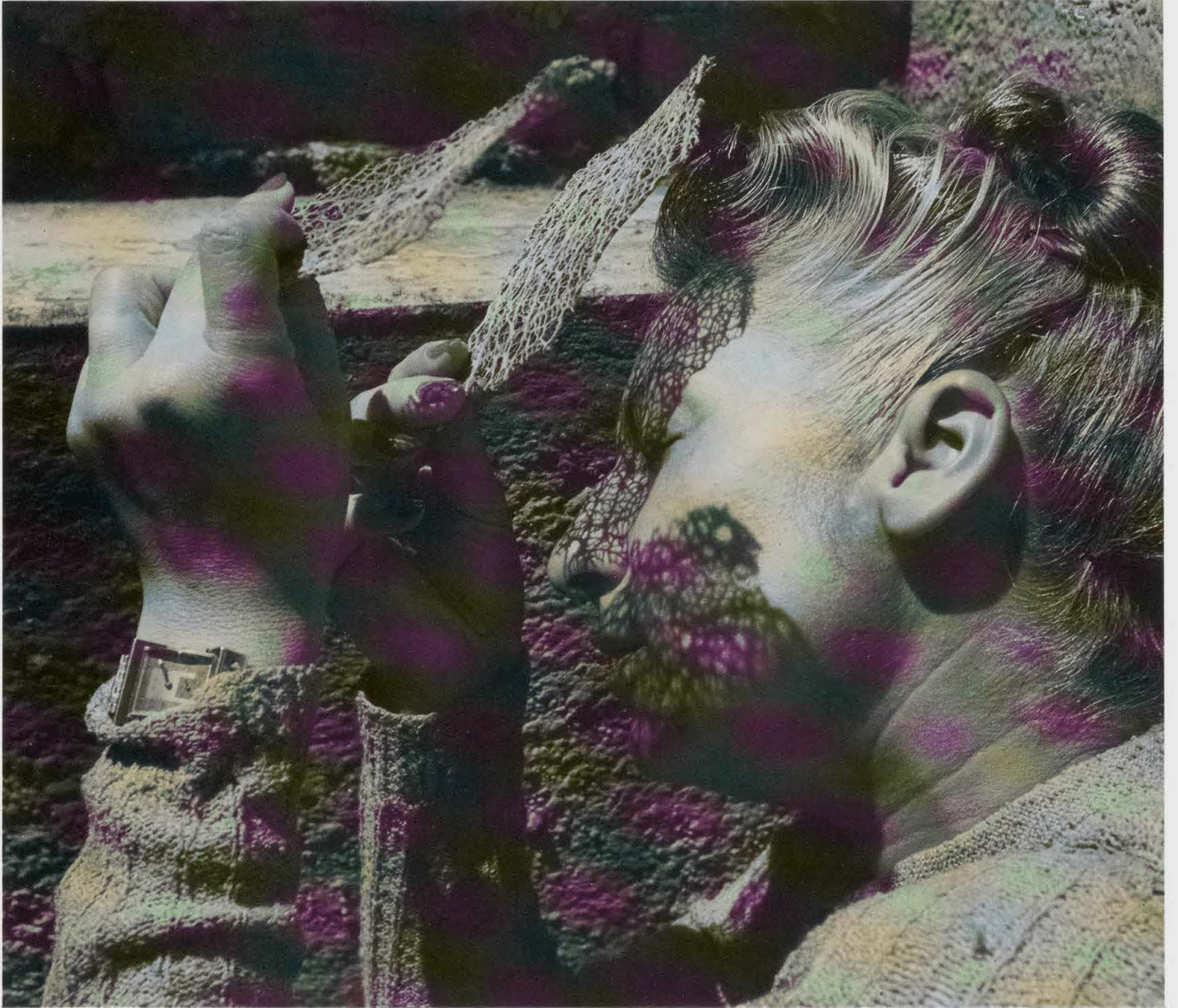
In Her Own Light

The fifty-year photographic career of Lola Alvarez Bravo (1907–1993) begins a powerful lineage of women photographers in twentieth-century Mexico. This volume examines the influence and innovation that Lola Alvarez Bravo brought to photography in her own country.

Reproductions of some of her most stirring and expressive images accompany exclusive biographical accounts that describe her introduction to the camera and darkroom during her early marriage to Manuel Alvarez Bravo, and her independent career as one of Mexico's premier professional photographers. She played a vital role in the Mexican cultural scene, working in close collaboration with Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Rufino Tamayo, Maria Izquierdo, and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

Despite her professional success, it is the personal photography of Lola Alvarez Bravo that marks her most significant bequest to the history of the medium. *In Her Own Light* is devoted to her work as an artist and includes those photographs of Mexico, her true subject, that place her among the renowned photographic interpreters of that country in the modern period: Edward Weston, Paul Strand, Tina Modotti, and Manuel Alvarez Bravo. Her direct, uncompromising, and impassioned studies of her Mexican compatriots offer a profound new chapter to the history of photography and the contributions of Mexico to it, both as creative force and indelible subject matter.

Lola Alvarez Bravo
In Her Own Light



Lola Alvarez Bravo
Autorretrato, ca. 1950
Self-portrait
Center for Creative Photography

Lola Alvarez Bravo
In Her Own Light

by Olivier Debroyse

English Version by James Oles

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The Center for Creative Photography is a museum and research center devoted to twentieth-century photography. Among its collections are archives of photographers who have made significant contributions to photography as an art form. Each issue of *The Archive* is drawn from the Center's extensive collections of photographs, manuscripts, and negatives.

Members of the Center receive an issue of *The Archive* each year and announcements for Center exhibitions and events. Memberships help to support the public programs of the Center. For information about membership, write to: Center for Creative Photography, The University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ 85721.

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Manuel Alvarez Bravo
El eclipse (Sábanas) [Lola Alvarez
Bravo], 1933
The Eclipse (Sheets)
Center for Creative Photography

Preface

TERENCE PITTS

Lola Alvarez Bravo is now acknowledged as a central figure in Mexican photography. Despite the influence she had in her own country, she has only very recently received attention in the United States, primarily as a result of widespread interest in her portraits of Frida Kahlo. This publication on the photography of Lola Alvarez Bravo, along with a biographical essay by Olivier Debroye, celebrates her long and distinguished career and continues the Center for Creative Photography's commitment to the study of twentieth-century Mexican photography.

Scarcely two years after its founding in 1975, the Center began collecting and exhibiting the works of Mexico's most important photographers. Indeed, the first exhibition catalog that the youthful Center ever produced was *Contemporary Photography in Mexico: 9 Photographers*. Although this interest is partly due to the proximity of Mexico, which begins only one hundred kilometers from our front door, it is also a conscious recognition of the impact that Mexico and its photographers and artists have had on American photographers, a phenomenon extensively documented in the Center's collections starting with Edward Weston's years in that country between 1923 and 1926 and Paul Strand's time there from 1932 through 1934.

In 1992, we began talking with Lola Alvarez Bravo about building a collection of her work at the Center. In concert with the photographer, our curator, Trudy Wilner Stack, selected one hundred photographs that represent her artis-

tic career in photography through a half dozen decades of dedication and reflect her contribution to her country's cultural heritage.

The assembling of this collection and the production of this publication could not have been accomplished without the help of a few key individuals. Olivier Debroye, an art historian and longtime resident of Mexico and friend of Lola Alvarez Bravo, worked with us from the beginning of this project and tirelessly offered his expertise and assistance. James Oles was also of immeasurable help and made a sensitive translation into English of Olivier's text. Important thanks go to Manuel Alvarez Martínez, Lola's only child. His valued cooperation was critical to this publication. Mariana Yampolsky and Jesús Sánchez Uribe provided insights into Señora Alvarez Bravo's life and work. Raquel Mejía served as editor of the Spanish text. Marcia Tiede and interns, Lorena Corral, Patricia Evans, and Stephanie Lipscomb, researched and cataloged the newly acquired collection of photographs. But what made this enterprise so remarkable was, of course, Lola Alvarez Bravo herself. She generously shared with us her intensity, her vision, and her passion for her art and country. Her death in July 1993 was a loss to the world of photography.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the generous and ongoing assistance of the Polaroid Corporation for its support of the publication of *The Archive*.



Manuel Alvarez Bravo
Caja de visiones [Lola Alvarez Bravo], 1930s
Vision Box
Center for Creative Photography

Introduction

TRUDY WILNER STACK

Photography has come of age to the extent that gaps in its previously limited history are being fast filled in by industrious historians, curators, critics, and dealers. A second chance at preeminence has arrived for many photographers. But for Lola Alvarez Bravo, as with numerous others, the success of her work came too late for her to share in its rewards. Even though she enjoyed the attention and accolades of the art establishment of her native Mexico with a substantial retrospective in 1992 at Mexico City's Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, she was by then eighty-five: old, unwell, and more than a little bitter over all the years of disregard. The Center for Creative Photography planned to produce this volume of *The Archive* in time to express the admiration and recognition of those north of the border, to assure her that there was a place for her in the history of photography alongside Edward Weston, Tina Modotti, Paul Strand, Ansel Adams, and her own ex-husband, Manuel Alvarez Bravo. We missed this chance by only a few months.

Clearly, that her imagery survives her mitigates regret — for like all meaningful art, its power exceeds its time. A long career as a working photographer produced thousands of prints that disclose a woman who took the medium seriously and to heart. As Olivier Debroise tenderly describes in his essay, Lola found her way to photography first through her partnership with Manuel and later as a stubbornly indepen-

dent woman whose camera was both her livelihood and her means of portraying the life she found before her. Her own vision had honesty, intelligence, and an organic, assured formal sense. For Lola Alvarez Bravo, the country of Mexico was most manifest in its people. Her populist aesthetic, refined but direct, was the locus of her sensibility.

Lola Alvarez Bravo photographed for many contexts. She worked as a photojournalist, commercial photographer, documenter of art, professional portraitist, and political artist. Over many decades she contributed to the cultural life of Mexico, all the while culling a small, core group of photographs she would refer to as her personal work, "*mis fotos, mi arte*." By the time we met, late in 1992, it was these photographs she held in her mind's eye. Almost blind, she needed only the shadowy outline of the print to know the image she had revealed in the darkroom many years before. The group of photographs reproduced here are among those she most valued, or are in the spirit of that distinction.

Olivier Debroise, the friend who made her final years more than they might otherwise have been, worked selflessly to help create a Lola Alvarez Bravo Collection for the Center for Creative Photography. For his vision and understanding, we are grateful. Through her trust in Olivier, Lola allowed us to set the stage for her work and life to unfold beyond the Mexico she loved and commemorated in her photographs.

Como cristal raspado: Acercamiento a la fotografía de Lola Alvarez Bravo

OLIVIER DEBROISE

1.

En 1953, el pintor Alfonso Michel, entrevistado por una reportera cultural del *Excélsior*, contestaba a la pregunta: ¿Quién es el mejor pintor de México?

Lola Alvarez Bravo es el mejor pintor de México. Hace una fotografía que es lo que más se acerca al concepto que yo tengo de la pintura. Un cristal raspado, la composición de la mujer que sabe ver “eso”. Y es muy raro en una mujer, porque las mujeres en la plástica son, según Leopardi, “con sentimiento, pero sin ideales”. Una obra de arte necesita de un perfecto equilibrio pocas veces logrado por una mujer que, en general, es apasionada. Es un animal de emociones.¹

Con este giro, Michel eludía comprometerse con alguno de los “tres grandes” de la plástica mexicana. Al elegir a una mujer, y además, a una fotógrafa, intentaba ser provocador y, de hecho, se situaba en un plano más general: asumía a la fotografía como una de “las bellas artes” sin recurrir a los discursos legitimadores que desde los años veinte acompañaban invariablemente todas las exposiciones de fotografía presentadas en recintos museográficos, cada una de las críticas a los fotógrafos que pretendieron transformar una “técnica de comunicación” en un oficio.

Alfonso Michel no cuestionaba tanto el estatus de la fotografía; le preocupaba mucho más, en realidad, ese “ser mujer” de Lola Alvarez Bravo que, según él, no afloraba en sus obras.

2.

Dolores Martínez de Anda nació en San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, el 3 de abril de 1907. Su madre Sara de Anda falleció poco después, y Lola fue educada por su padre Gonzalo Martínez, importador de muebles y de objetos de decoración europeos que satisfacían los gustos afrancesados de la aristocracia mexicana del porfiriato. Cuando en 1916, murió a su vez el padre de Lola, víctima de un ataque cardíaco en un tren que los llevaba a Veracruz, la niña fue recogida por un medio hermano mucho mayor que ella, Miguel Martínez, quien vivía en un departamento de las calles de Guatemala, “derechito desde la puerta de Catedral”, en el pleno centro de la ciudad de México.

Muchos años después, paseando con Lola Alvarez Bravo por estas calles, entramos a la antigua casa de dos patios y escaleras exteriores. Por todos lados asomaban sacos con retazos de tela de los innumerables talleres de sastrería que ocupaban los viejos departamentos: jirones de todos colores colgaban de los barandales de hierro forjado, de las escaleras, de las ventanas, de los techos inclusive. Como el resto de este barrio, la casona padeció las mutaciones de la ciudad, la huida de los estudiantes cuando trasladaron la Universidad al Pedregal y también la huida de los comerciantes.

En su tiempo, fue uno de los palacios de la ciudad, una casa opulenta de tres pisos, con pesado portón de madera que sólo abría de par en par para que los carruajes llegaran al pie de la escalera principal; dos patios, el de los amos y el de los criados, de la servidumbre incalculable. Ahora es una casa de vecindad atrás del Templo Mayor cuya fachada de cantera blanca ha sido pintada de piso a techo con laca rojo ber-

Like Cut Glass: An Approach to the Photography of Lola Alvarez Bravo

OLIVIER DEBROISE

English Version by James Oles

1.

In a 1953 interview with the cultural reporter for Mexico City's *Excelsior* newspaper, the Mexican painter Alfonso Michel¹ offered a surprising answer to the question, "Who is the most important painter in Mexico?":

Lola Alvarez Bravo is the finest painter in Mexico. Her photographs come closest to my own conception of painting. Like cut glass, her compositions are those of a woman who knows how to see the thing itself. And this is very rare in a woman, because women who practice the fine arts are, according to Leopardi, "sentimental, but without ideals." A work of art needs a perfect balance, something rarely achieved by women who are in general passionate, emotional beasts.²

With this twist, Michel avoided affiliating himself with any of the "three greats" of Mexican muralism, José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, or David Alfaro Siqueiros. By selecting a woman, and even more, a photographer, he meant to provoke his audience and tackle broader issues: he assumed photography to be one of the fine arts without repeating the legitimizing discourse that, since the twenties, invariably accompanied photographic exhibitions in museums and shaped the self-definition of photographers who were attempting to transform a mere "technique of communication" into art.

Alfonso Michel did not question the status of photography: what concerned him more was the strength of Lola Alvarez Bravo's imagery and that a female presence was not obvious in her work.

2.

Dolores Martínez de Anda was born in San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco, on April 3, 1907. Her mother Sara de Anda died soon afterward, and Lola was raised by her father, Gonzalo Martínez, an importer of European furniture and decorative objects that satisfied the French tastes of the Mexican aristocracy during the Porfiriato.³ In 1916, Lola's father died of a heart attack while riding the train to Veracruz with his daughter. Lola was taken in by her much older half-brother, Miguel Martínez, who lived in an apartment on the Calle de Guatemala, "straight down from the door of the Cathedral," in the center of Mexico City.

Many years later, I walked with Lola Alvarez Bravo along those same streets, and we entered an ancient house with two patios and open staircases. Every available space was crammed with bags of fabric, discards from the countless clothing workshops that now occupied the former apartments: rags of all colors hung from the wrought iron balcony rails, from the stairs, from the windows, even from the roof. Like the rest of the neighborhood, this old building revealed the transformation of downtown Mexico City, now abandoned by the university, leading businesses, and affluent families — all fleeing to the less congested suburbs.

In its time, this building was one of the city's elegant colonial mansions, an opulent three-storied house, with a heavy wooden door that only occasionally opened to admit the carriages that stopped at the foot of the main stairway. As for the two patios, one was reserved for the family, the other for their innumerable servants. Later converted into a den of apartments, the building's once white limestone facade is now painted a brilliant vermilion. It remains today as a col-

mellón, y brillante.

Lola era interna con las hermanas francesas del Sagrado Corazón de Jesús, en Tacubaya. Sólo llegaba a Guatemala número 20 a pasar los fines de semana y las vacaciones. No tenía muy buena relación con su medio hermano y albacea, y se llevaba aún menos con su esposa. Prefería deambular por las calles aledañas, con algunos amigos de la vecindad. Al fondo del segundo patio, en cuartos adaptados a como dé lugar en departamentos, vivía Soledad Bravo la viuda de un pintor y periodista, Manuel Alvarez García, hijo él mismo de don Manuel Alvarez Rivas, pintor y fotógrafo en los tiempos de las *cartes de visite*. Soledad Bravo tenía tres hijos, Federico, Manuel e Isabel.

Manuel Alvarez Bravo también era interno, con los hermanos maristas de Tlalpan. El también pasaba sus fines de semana y sus vacaciones en Guatemala número 20. La azotea era el espacio común, su comuna: enlazaba a los dos patios.

Lola Alvarez Bravo quiso evocar, quizás, estos recuerdos cuando retrató a una niña solitaria vestida de encajes blancos en lo alto de la escalera metálica de un patio de vecindad.²

En 1915, el año terrible de la llegada de los zapatistas y de la hambruna en la ciudad de México, para ayudar a su madre y a sus hermanos, Manuel Alvarez Bravo tuvo que dejar de estudiar y empezó a trabajar como lo que, en aquel México que emergía del porfiriato, se llamaba *garçon de course*. Apenas tenía trece años. Al año siguiente consiguió un modesto empleo en la Contraloría Nacional.

Manuel Alvarez Bravo vivió muchos años con la cabeza llena de números, sumando, restando, multiplicando y dividiendo. Como resolvía las operaciones antes que nadie y le quedaba tiempo libre, deambulaba el resto del día. Tenía un compañero en la escuela de Tlalpan, que se llamaba Luis Ferrari y era hijo de Fernando Ferrari Pérez, verdadero científico del porfiriato, botánico e ingeniero quien construyó el Museo del Chopo a imitación del insigne Gustave Eiffel. También tomaba fotografías: *El Mundo* publicó alguna vez sus vistas de las grutas de Cacahuamilpa iluminadas por una luz de magnesio, y unas picadas del centro de la ciudad de México que realizó desde un avión con la ayuda de Silva, el retratista de artistas.

Ferrari Pérez le mostró a Manuel cómo se hacía una foto. Este primer aprendizaje no duró demasiado, ni fue complicado (lo que más, las focales, pero Manuel estaba acostumbrado a jugar con los números): algo había en ello que lo cautivó. La pasión por las imágenes. Pidió prestada la cámara y empezó el juego.³

Ferrari Pérez conocía a medio México y era amigo de

Hugo Brehme, el fotógrafo alemán de la calle 16 de Septiembre. Este lo acompañaba muchas veces en sus excursiones fotográficas en los alrededores de México. Alguna vez — habrá sido en 1921 o 1922 — invitaron a Manuel, con su camarita.

Manuel Alvarez Bravo penetró así, por primera vez, en un verdadero laboratorio fotográfico moderno. Displicente, Brehme le enseñó cómo revelar, cómo imprimir en platino. Ya no eran simples balbuceos técnicos, sino procedimientos sofisticados que requerían extremos cuidados y, sobre todo, un equipo caro y difícil de conseguir. Brehme le dio una chambita: imprimir postales, preparar líquidos, secar las fotos.

Manuel hizo entonces sus primeras fotografías en serio, por decirlo de alguna manera. Las que se atreve a mostrarnos — muy pocas — reflejan la profunda influencia del fotógrafo alemán. El caso es que, un día en 1924, Hugo Brehme usó uno de los clichés de Manuel para hacer una tarjeta postal y la firmó con su nombre. Manuel Alvarez Bravo creyó que esto era un gran honor. Tal vez lo fue.

El centro de la ciudad de México fue sin duda esencial durante la etapa de formación tanto de Lola como de Manuel Alvarez Bravo. Muchos años más tarde recordarían sus correrías por el centro de la ciudad con otros muchachos y muchachas de familias empobrecidas por la revolución, destrozadas, separadas por la guerra civil. En 1930, escribieron al alimón el guión de una película que nunca se llegó a filmar, en el que describían en sombrío tono realista la vida de un grupo de niños pandilleros abandonados a su suerte, que se ven obligados a trabajar antes de tiempo para sobrevivir, para ayudar a sus hermanos más jóvenes.

Aquel pobre barrio de la metrópoli estaba habitado por trabajadores, vagos y gente maleante. . . . Las calles convergían a una plazuela con unos cuantos árboles raquíticos, bancas desvencijadas y algunas briznas de césped que las espaldas de los mecaperos borrachos. . . . y los rudos juegos de los niños, impedían que se desarrollaran. . . . Entre bulto y bulto, los cargadores se escapan de la pulquería cercana. . . . Mujeres humildes en ir y venir, colocaban en sus pequeñas canastas lo poco que podían comprar.⁴

Esta evocación de una ciudad llena de peligros adultos, no está muy lejos de las interpretaciones fotográficas, de la poesía en tono menor, de Manuel Alvarez Bravo tal y como aparece, por ejemplo, en algunas tempranas fotografías: *Dos pares de piernas*, 1928; *Los agachados*, 1932; y *Parábola óptica*,

lection of workshops behind the Templo Mayor, the recently excavated Aztec pyramid.

Lola enrolled as a student in a convent school run by the French sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in the suburb of Tacubaya. She only returned to No. 20, Calle de Guatemala on weekends and over her vacations. Her relationship with her half-brother, who was also her legal guardian, was poor, and she got along even less well with his wife. Lola preferred to roam the neighboring streets with friends from the building. Off the back patio, in rooms haphazardly adapted into apartments, lived Soledad Bravo, the widow of the painter and journalist Manuel Alvarez García, himself the son of Don Manuel Alvarez Rivas, a painter and amateur photographer in the era of the *carte de visite*. Soledad Bravo had three children: Federico, Manuel, and Isabel.

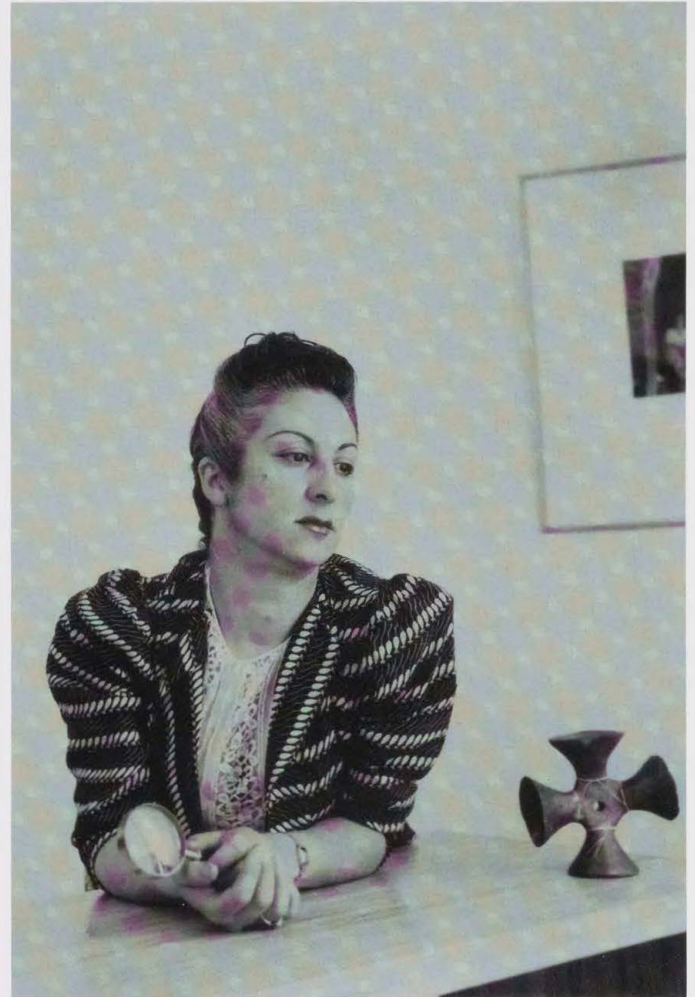
Manuel Alvarez Bravo was studying as well, with the Marist brothers in distant Tlalpan. He also spent his weekends and vacations at No. 20, Calle de Guatemala. The rooftop, which embraced both patios, served as a communal space for all the residents, a place to meet.

Lola Alvarez Bravo may have been trying to evoke those times, those memories, when, years later, she photographed a girl dressed in white lace, standing alone at the top of a metal staircase in the patio of a similar tenement house (*Vicindad* [Tenement], ca. 1945).

In 1915, the terrible year of the arrival of the Zapatistas and of famine in Mexico City, Manuel Alvarez Bravo was forced to quit his studies to help support his mother, brother, and sister. Just thirteen years old, he began work as an office boy, or as it was still called in Mexico after the Porfiriato years, a *garçon de course*. The following year, he obtained a modest position in the National Accounting Office.

For many years Manuel Alvarez Bravo worked with his head filled with numbers. Endowed with a tremendous facility for adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing huge sums in his head, he completed tasks much earlier than his fellow workers and spent his free afternoons wandering the streets of the city.

Manuel had a schoolmate in Tlalpan named Luis Ferrari, who was the son of Fernando Ferrari Pérez, a botanist and engineer. A quintessential scientist of the Porfiriato, Ferrari Pérez built the Natural History Museum in Mexico City in the 1890s, and he also took photographs. The illustrated daily, *El Mundo*, had published his scenes of the Cave of Cacahuamilpa illuminated by magnesium lights and aerial views of the city taken from an airplane with the assistance of the portrait photographer Silva.



Manuel Alvarez Bravo
Lola Alvarez Bravo, n.d.

Ferrari Pérez showed Manuel how a photograph was made. This first apprenticeship was brief and relatively uncomplicated (mainly a question of calculating the exposure, but Manuel was used to playing with numbers). From the start something about it captivated him and stimulated a passion for images. One day, Manuel asked to borrow the camera, and the game began.⁴

Ferrari Pérez knew half of Mexico and was a friend of Hugo Brehme, the German pictorialist photographer with a studio on the Calle de 16 de Septiembre. He often accompanied Brehme on his numerous photographic excursions. One time — it must have been 1921 or 1922 — they invited Manuel, who brought along his own little camera.



Manuel Alvarez Bravo
Parábola óptica, 1931
 Optic Parable
 Center for Creative Photography

1931 — imágenes enigmáticas de una ciudad, ya entonces indescifrable.

Más interesada que Manuel por aquéllos que en el siglo XIX se llamaban comunmente “tipos populares”, en su larga serie de personajes sorprendidos en las calles, Lola deja entrever un mismo encanto (¿una misma nostalgia?). Sus “humildes héroes” aparecen revestidos siempre de una dignidad que consiste, muchas veces, en no ocultar, en no disfrazar, pero tampoco en subrayar su pobreza.⁵ Lola Alvarez Bravo supo captarlos en plena labor, no posando con sus herramientas, como suele suceder en la fotografía de tipo etnológico. Aprendió quizás con Paul Strand, a quien conoció en 1933, esta manera de fotografiar sin aparentarlo, de esconderse detrás de una cámara que va y viene, apunta a las nubes, a las montañas, a los objetos, y de repente, ful-

minante, dispara sobre el sujeto, aprovechando un momento de distracción.

3.

A mediados de 1924, Manuel fue enviado por la Contraloría a su agencia de Oaxaca. Antes de viajar, se casó con Lola, y compró una nueva cámara, una Century Master 25. Vivieron tres años en esta provincia; tres intensos años que Lola Alvarez Bravo recordaría como los más felices de su vida. Escapaba por fin de la opresión familiar, del tedio de su rígida educación religiosa. Tenían mucho tiempo libre en Oaxaca: poco a poco se fue familiarizando con los productos químicos, la magia de los revelados, el misterio de la fotografía.

Lola recuerda sus inicios en la fotografía, en su casa de Oaxaca:

Por la noche, la cocina se hacía cuarto oscuro y ahí, en unos apaxtles que habíamos agujerados para que corriera el agua, revelábamos. Yo le decía: “Manuel, déjame hacer una mía”, y el me contestaba: “Luego, luego, tú menéale, tú menéale”.⁶

La primera obra de Lola Alvarez Bravo se confunde con la de Manuel Alvarez Bravo, de la misma manera que las primeras fotografías de Tina Modotti a veces están confundidas con las de Edward Weston. En ambos casos, la pareja utilizaba la misma cámara, el mismo laboratorio, y hasta cierto punto resulta muy difícil saber quién disparó, quién imprimió.

Yo de repente le decía: “ay, déjame tomar una fotito”, y ya tomaba una foto pero mucho tiempo viví yo despersonalizada. Entonces tomaba una foto, la revelaba y no la volvía a tomar en cuenta; después volvía a sacar otra foto, y era lo mismo. Yo me ocupaba más de revelar, de lavarle las negativas y de hacer las cosas que teníamos ahí en común, de chicharo digamos y lo que yo hacía lo hacía con ganas, pero inconsciente, sin propio interés de guardarlo ni de archivarlo como que estaba más convencida de lo que él hacía que de lo que yo hacía.⁷

Había fotógrafos por todos lados. Acompañaban a los políticos en sus giras de trabajo. Editaban álbumes conmemorativos de construcciones, inauguraciones y restauraciones. Documentaban catástrofes: incendios, terremotos, inundaciones, accidentes de tránsito. Refrendaban los problemas del

It was at Hugo Brehme's that Manuel Alvarez Bravo entered a truly modern photographic studio for the first time. Brehme indulged the boy, showing him how to develop negatives and to print in platinum. These were no longer simple technical stammerings, but sophisticated procedures that required extreme care and, above all, expensive and scarce equipment. Brehme gave Manuel a variety of odd jobs: printing postcards, preparing solutions, drying prints.

It was then that Manuel made his first "serious" photographs. The very few he has dared show reflect the profound influence of Brehme's pictorialist style. The story goes that one day Brehme used one of Manuel's negatives to print a postcard, though he signed it with his own name. Manuel Alvarez Bravo believed this to be a great honor. Perhaps it was in 1924.

Without a doubt the colonial heart of Mexico City was essential to the formative years of both Lola and Manuel. In 1930, they would recall a childhood spent racing through the streets in the company of other children from equally impoverished families torn apart by the Revolution. In the draft for a film script that was never produced, they described in somber, realistic tones the life of a gang of street urchins, abandoned to their fate, forced to work before their time in order to support their families.

That poor neighborhood of the metropolis was inhabited by workers, vagrants, and evil types. . . . The streets converged on a plaza with a few spindly trees, shattered benches, and some patches of grass whose growth was impeded by the backs of drunken *mecapaleros* . . . and the rough games of children. . . . Between loads, porters escaped to a nearby *pulquería*. . . . Poor women came and went, placing what little they could buy in their small baskets.⁵

This evocation of a city filled with adult horrors is not so distant from the photographic interpretations, rendered in poetry of a lower key, of Manuel Alvarez Bravo: *Dos pares de piernas* [Two Pairs of Legs], 1928; *Los agachados* [The Crouched Ones], 1932; and *Parábola óptica* [Optic Parable], 1931, for example, are all enigmatic images of an increasingly illegible city.

Lola was more interested than Manuel in those human subjects commonly called "popular types" in the nineteenth century. Yet in her extensive series of characters surprised on the streets, one can detect an enchantment, or perhaps a nostalgia similar to Manuel's. Her "humble heroes" are dignified: their poverty is not hidden, disguised, or underlined.⁶



Paul Strand
Woman and Boy, Tenancingo, 1933
Center for Creative Photography

Lola captured them at work, rather than simply posing them with the tools of their trades, a hallmark of ethnographic photography. She may have learned from Paul Strand, whom she met in 1933, this way of photographing without being obvious, of hiding behind a camera that comes and goes, that points towards clouds, mountains, objects, and then suddenly strikes, capturing the subject, taking advantage of a moment of distraction.

3.

In mid-1924, Manuel was sent by the Accounting Office to their branch in the southern state of Oaxaca. Before leaving, he and Lola were married, and he bought a new camera, a Century Master 25. They lived three years in Oaxaca, three



Lola Alvarez Bravo
Manuel Alvarez Bravo, ca. 1934
Center for Creative Photography

país y sus conquistas, marchas de campesinos encolerizados, de ferrocarrileros en huelga, de petroleros triunfantes. Llenaban de rostros sonrientes las páginas de sociales de los diarios y de crudas, siniestras muecas, las de la nota roja.

Nada de esto, aparentemente, le interesaba a Manuel Alvarez Bravo. Le gustaba la literatura, el arte.⁸ Aunque de familia pobre, y modesto funcionario, tenía gustos de diletante que, por regla general, pertenecen a la aristocracia. La fotografía era apenas un hobby, un amable pasatiempo. No se convertirá jamás en una profesión. Manuel Alvarez Bravo afirma reiteradamente que él nunca se ha considerado un “profesional”, sino un aficionado en el sentido más amplio y noble de la palabra.⁹ Desde los inicios, su manera de abordar la fotografía se opone drásticamente a la de los profesionales de la primera mitad del siglo. La *nonchalance*, la actitud distanciada — mas no fría — de quien tiene su tiempo, cuyo tiempo está solamente dedicado a la contemplación, marca profundamente la obra fotográfica de Manuel Alvarez Bravo. Sólo así pudo haber “descubierto”, en las calles de la ciudad de México, en los paisajes del valle, en los muros, los basureros, las demoliciones, estos raros objetos, estos “hallazgos” inesperados que, obviamente, despertarían más tarde el interés de André Breton.

Lola Alvarez Bravo parece haber tomado más en serio su “profesión”, y fue sin duda una “chambeadora” empeñada, terca, inclusive.¹⁰ Pero no pretendió a la artificio — sino hasta más tarde, hasta finales de los años setenta, y en gran parte también para seguir una postura que, en México, había

inventado Manuel Alvarez Bravo siguiendo el ejemplo de Weston y Strand. Pero Lola heredó de Manuel. Heredó de aquellos años de formación en Oaxaca, esa manera distante de fotografiar que la distingue de sus colegas fotorreporteros, ávidos de sensacionalismo, en perpetua busca de un *scoop*.

Un día, un amigo me apuntó a dos personas, Tina y Weston — le contó Manuel Alvarez Bravo a Mildred Constantine —; cada uno cargaba su cámara. Fue la primera vez que la ví, cerca de la iglesia de La Santísima. Miraron la iglesia pero no tomaron ninguna fotografía.¹¹

En noviembre de 1924, la Secretaría de Educación Pública presentó una exposición colectiva en el Palacio de Minería en la que participaron Edward Weston y, por primera vez, su discípula Tina Modotti. Manuel y Lola visitaron esta muestra. Lola recordaba que ahí estaba este señor Weston del que todo el mundo hablaba, pero que sólo lo vieron de lejos; no se atrevieron a dirigirle la palabra.

Antes de la llegada de Edward Weston a México — comenta Lola Alvarez Bravo — la fotografía era pictorialista. Había que fotografiar a unos señores en un estudio sin vida, la imagen de un árbol o un lago con unas nubecitas. La luz de México, los tipos y los ambientes de México permitieron que Weston descubriera nuevas formas: un montón de sombreros de paja, unas ollas negras, el pisar de unos pies, la riqueza que hay en la mirada de la gente, toda la belleza plástica de las cosas.¹²

La forma “westoniana” influyó sutilmente en el estilo de la fotografía mexicana moderna. La estancia del californiano y de su discípula Tina Modotti en el país, entre 1923 y 1926, ampliamente difundida por las revistas de vanguardia y los periódicos, abrió efectivamente nuevas posibilidades; amplió el rango de visión, otorgó a cierta fotografía un estatus diferente.

Los más cercanos y más susceptibles de comprender en México la aportación de Weston a la fotografía moderna, Tina Modotti, Manuel y Lola Alvarez Bravo, se desprendieron muy pronto del formalismo purista que marcó con más profundidad la fotografía norteamericana y tiende a la abstracción. No soportaban la idea de “la imagen por la imagen”. Conservaron, es cierto, el gusto por los efectos de la luz, por los contrastes, esta nitidez deslumbrante — “el cristal raspado” — de una fotografía que se asume como lenguaje, pero no compartieron la mística del paisaje que vuelve tan frías algunas imágenes de Ansel Adams, ni se

years that Lola Alvarez Bravo would remember as the happiest of her life. They had finally escaped from familial pressures and from the tedium of a strict religious education. They had a lot of free time: little by little, Lola became familiar with the chemicals, with the magic of developing prints, with the mystery of photography.

Lola once recalled how her career in photography began in their house in Oaxaca:

At night, we turned the kitchen into a darkroom, and there, in some clay dishes that we'd drilled to let the water run, we developed [the prints]. I would tell him, "Manuel, let me do one of mine," and he answered, "Soon, soon, move it, move it."⁷

Lola's first work as a photographer blends confusingly with that of her husband Manuel, just as the earliest images of Tina Modotti sometimes resemble those of Edward Weston. In both cases, the couple used the same camera, the same darkroom, and to a certain extent it remains difficult to know just who tripped the shutter, just who made the print.

Once in a while I would tell [Manuel], "Hey, let me take a picture," and I did, but for a long time I felt depersonalized. I'd take a picture, develop it, but then I wouldn't pay any attention to it; after a while, I'd take another, and the same thing happened. I spent most of my time developing, washing his negatives, doing the things we had in common, like a kitchen maid, and what I had to do I did, and with enthusiasm, but unconsciously, without any particular interest in keeping or saving anything [of my own], as if I was more convinced of what he was doing than of what I was doing.⁸

In the twenties, there were photographers everywhere in Mexico. They accompanied politicians on their tours through the country. They produced and edited albums commemorating construction projects, inaugurations, and restorations. They documented catastrophes: fires, earthquakes, floods, and accidents. They revealed the problems and the achievements of the nation: marches of enraged peasants, striking railwaymen, and triumphant petroleum workers. They filled the society pages with smiling faces and the police blotter with crude and sinister grimaces.

None of this apparently interested Manuel Alvarez Bravo. He preferred literature and art.⁹ Although a mid-level bureaucrat from a poor background, Manuel already had the



Edward Weston
Tres Ollas, 1926
Center for Creative Photography

tastes of a dilettante, tastes more typical of the aristocracy. For him, photography was a hobby, a pleasant pastime that would never become a profession. In fact, Manuel Alvarez Bravo has repeatedly affirmed that he never considered himself a "professional," but rather an amateur in the broadest, noblest, sense of the word.¹⁰ From the beginning, his approach to photography was drastically different from that of the working photographers of the time. Nonchalance, that distanced — but not cold — attitude of someone who dedicates an inordinate amount of time to contemplation, deeply marks his images. Only thus could he have discovered, in the streets of Mexico City, in rural landscapes, on walls, and in trash heaps and demolitions, those strange objects, those unexpected finds that would not surprisingly spark the interest of French surrealist André Breton.

Lola Alvarez Bravo took her "profession" more seriously; she was always a dedicated worker, even stubborn. Yet she never really considered herself an "artist," until perhaps much later, toward the end of the seventies, and then in great part due to the artist's role Manuel Alvarez Bravo himself had adopted, following the examples of Weston and Strand. Lola learned from Manuel a distanced manner of photographing during those years in the kitchen in Oaxaca that distinguishes her work from that of her fellow photojournalists, those avid seekers of the sensational, the scoop.

In an interview with Mildred Constantine, Manuel

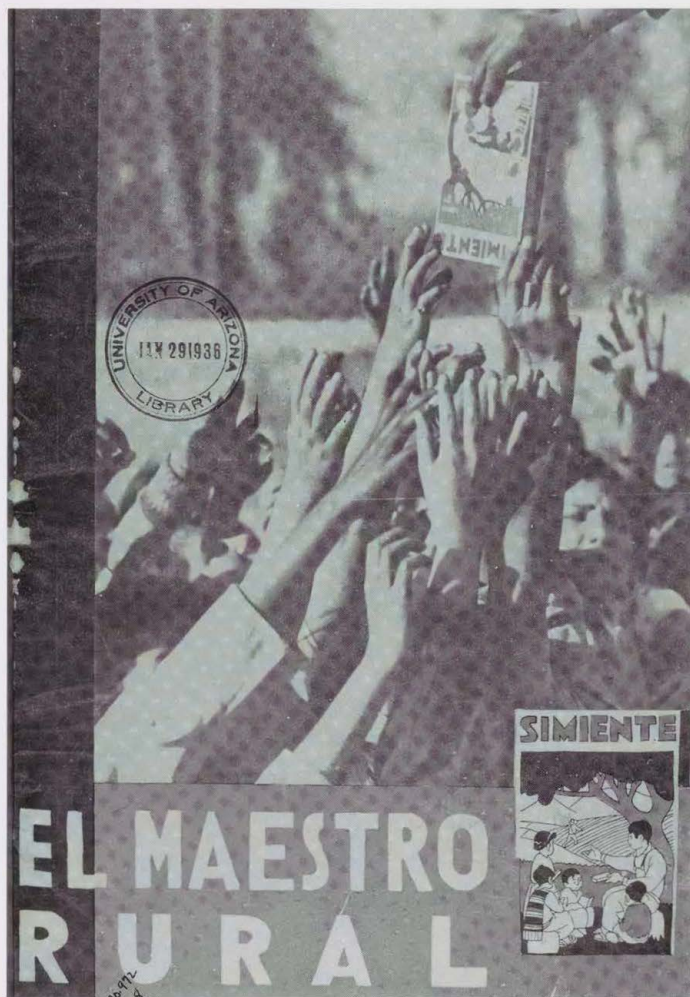
detuvieron sobre una forma porque evocaba “otra cosa”. Por el contrario, Manuel y Lola Alvarez Bravo fotografiaron espacios habitados por el hombre, vividos; no idealizaron, como tantos otros antes y después, los rostros indígenas y las actitudes seculares de los campesinos, ni reivindicaron elementos fácilmente folklorizables de los ritos religiosos del México profundo. Como los pintores, los músicos y los poetas de su generación (con quienes se relacionaron muy rápidamente a su retorno a la ciudad de México en 1927), encontraron su materia estética ahí donde anteriormente sólo se veía suciedad y pobreza.

4.

Lola Alvarez Bravo se convierte en fotógrafa *à part entière* con la separación, en 1934, cuando se instala con su hijo (y en una forma “provisional” que va a durar, sin embargo, varios años) en casa de la pintora María Izquierdo en la calle de Venezuela.¹³ Para vivir da clase de dibujo en las escuelas primarias. No piensa, quizás, en hacer carrera solitaria como fotógrafa, pero un día el diputado Héctor Pérez Martínez le pide que tome fotos de un acto político en los patios de la Secretaría de Educación Pública.

El primer día, Héctor Pérez Martínez me dió unos rollos y me dijo: “Viene el Secretario a una reunión con los maestros, así que usted baja al patio, y retrata a todo el mundo”. “Pero si yo no sé hacer esto”, le dije. “Pues ésa es su chamba, así que baje, y tome las fotos”. Y así, muerta del susto, empecé.¹⁴

Le tiemblan las piernas, le tiemblan las manos, pero Lola se lanza al ruedo. Las fotos son buenas, y Pérez Martínez la nombra fotógrafa titular de *El Maestro Rural*, una revista llena de consejos útiles, de recetas, de descripciones de métodos de enseñanza, orientada a los maestros de primaria, dentro del marco de la llamada “escuela socialista” en vigor durante la gestión de Narciso Bassols. Lola Alvarez Bravo se inclina ante las necesidades de los artículos: prepara las innumerables ilustraciones. Esto la lleva por todos los rumbos de México, desde los confines de la ciudad, en las fábricas, los hospitales, las estaciones de bomberos, los mataderos, los orfanatorios, las escuelas, hasta los campos de maíz y de chile, etc. Entre imágenes dictadas por los textos que deben ilustrar (grupos de niños levantando sus manuales al aire en plena tradición soviética, etc.), Lola aprende a componer: fotografía pilas de periódicos, sacos de trigo, acercamientos de piezas de maquinaria, composiciones abstractas, pero siempre con un



Front cover of *El Maestro Rural*, 1936
Photomontage and photographs by
Lola Alvarez Bravo
University of Arizona Library

contenido social. En las portadas de la revista, también surgen los primeros fotomontajes.

Lola Alvarez Bravo no fue la primera fotógrafa mexicana: desde mediados del siglo XIX, varias mujeres asistieron a las clases que se impartían en escuelas de artes y oficios, llegaron inclusive a presentar obras en exposiciones de la antigua Academia de San Carlos. Entre ellas algunas, no eran simples aficionadas: en los estudios fotográficos ayudaban anónima, discretamente, en las difíciles labores de laboratorio, en la organización de las estudiadas poses de los retratos en *carte de visite*. Algunas despuntaron, como Victoria Torres, la mayor de los hermanos Torres, con estudio en Toluca, en el Callejón del Progreso desde 1876, y luego instalada con la firma Torres y Flores, en la Calle de La Profesa número 2 en la

Alvarez Bravo recalled seeing two new photographers in the streets of Mexico City:

One day, a friend pointed out two people to me, Tina and Weston, each carrying a camera. It was the first time that I saw her, near the Church of the Santísima. They looked at the church but didn't take a single photograph.¹¹

In November of 1924, Manuel and Lola went together to see a group show sponsored by the Ministry of Public Education in the Palacio de Minería, in which Edward Weston exhibited his work together with that of his disciple, Tina Modotti. Lola recalled that at the exhibition there was this "Mr. Weston" everyone was talking about, but that they only saw him from afar and did not dare introduce themselves.

Before the arrival of Edward Weston in Mexico, photography was pictorialist. One had to photograph either people in a lifeless studio, or trees and lakes surrounded by little clouds. The Mexican light, the people and moods of the country, allowed Weston to discover new forms: a mountain of straw sombreros, some black water jars, the step of a foot, the richness that there is in the look of the people, in all the plastic beauty of things.¹²

Weston's emphasis on form subtly influenced the style of modern Mexican photography. The residence of Weston and Modotti in Mexico from 1923 to 1926, widely publicized in newspapers and avant-garde magazines, opened new possibilities for photographers: he widened the angle of vision, he gave photography a new and different status.

Those closest to Weston, and those most able to understand his contribution to modern photography — Tina Modotti, Manuel and Lola Alvarez Bravo — soon distanced themselves from pure formalism, which was more typical of photography in the United States and which tended towards abstraction. None could stomach the idea of the "image for the image's sake." They shared Weston's penchant for capturing the effects of light and of contrasts, that dazzling precision — "like cut glass" — of photography. But they did not share an interest in the mystique of the landscape that would make Ansel Adams's images so chilling, nor did they focus on forms that evoked "equivalents." On the contrary, Lola and Manuel photographed inhabited space, a world lived in by men and women. But, unlike so many others before and after, they never idealized Indian faces or traditional rural

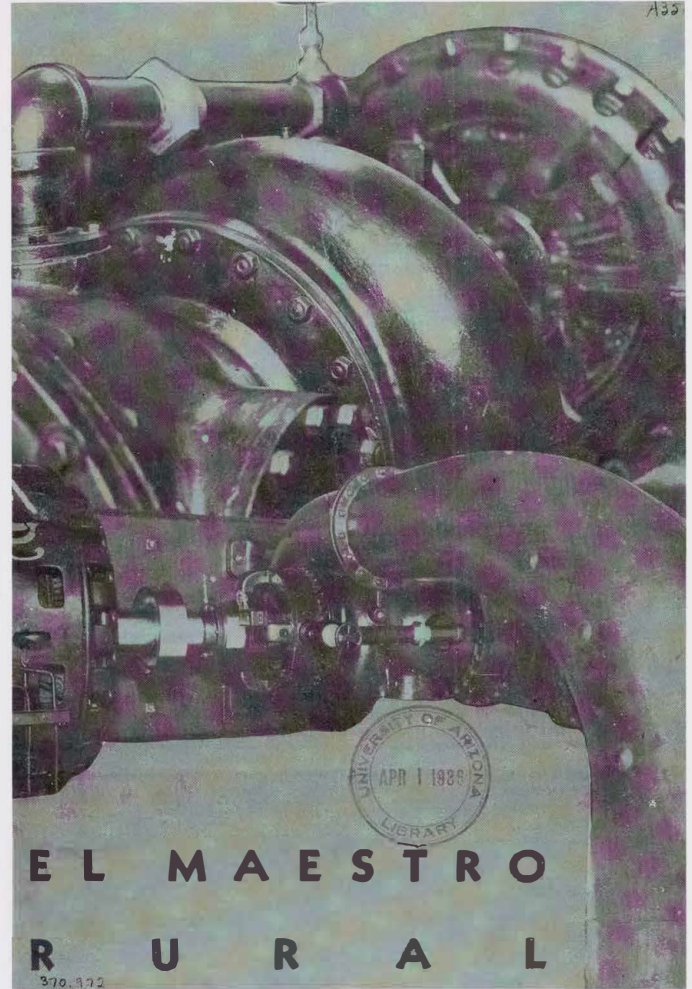
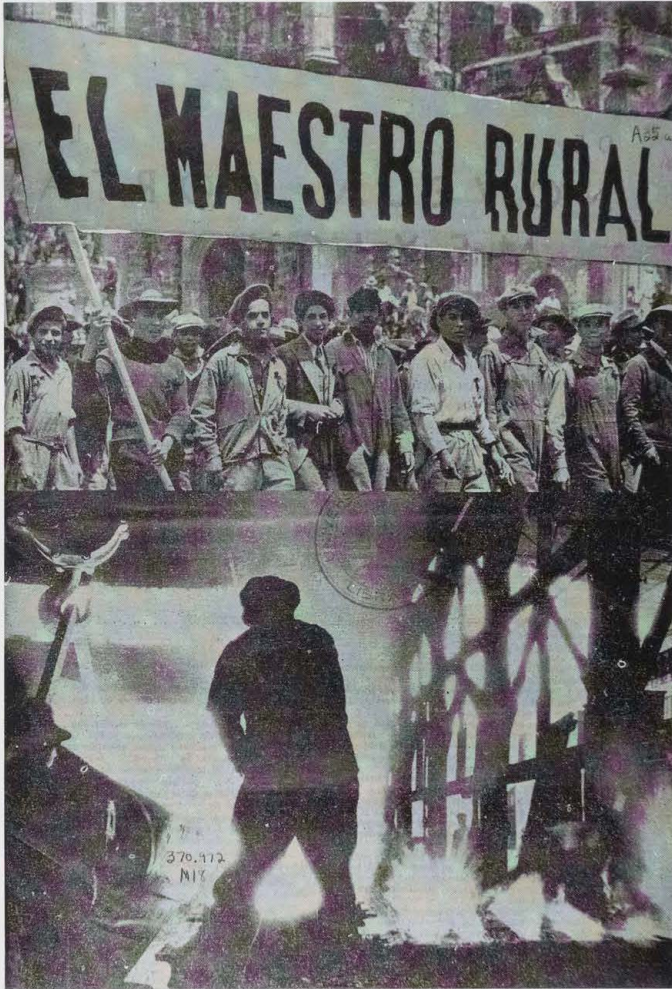
life, nor did they convert the religious beliefs of interior Mexico into mere folklore. Along with the painters, musicians, and poets of their generation, with whom they quickly became associated after their return to Mexico City in 1927, Manuel and Lola Alvarez Bravo saw aesthetic subjects where others found only filth and poverty.

4.

Lola Alvarez Bravo became a full-time photographer as a result of her separation from Manuel Alvarez Bravo in 1934. With her young son, she moved into the home of the painter María Izquierdo on the Calle de Venezuela in what was originally intended as a provisional arrangement, but in fact lasted several years.¹³ To earn a living, she taught drawing in elementary schools and may not have thought twice about a career in photography until Héctor Pérez Martínez, a legislator, hired her to photograph a political ceremony at the Ministry of Public Education, where Lola was cataloging the photographic archive:

That first day, Héctor Pérez Martínez gave me a few rolls of film and said, "The Minister [of Education] is coming to a meeting of teachers, so just come down to the patio and take pictures of everyone." "But I don't know how to do that," I told him. "Well, it's your job, so come down and take the photos." And so, scared to death, I began.¹⁴

Her hands and legs trembled, but Lola entered the fray. Pleased with the results, Pérez Martínez named her chief photographer for *El Maestro Rural*, a monthly magazine published by the Ministry primarily for elementary school teachers. Filled with useful advice, descriptions of teaching methods, and even recipes, *El Maestro Rural* was one of several socialist education projects developed in the early thirties during Narciso Bassols's term as Minister of Education. Lola Alvarez Bravo's main task was to provide countless and generally uncredited illustrations for the magazine's varied articles, a job which took her to every corner of Mexico: to factories, hospitals, fire stations, stockyards, orphanages, and schools, to fields of corn and chile peppers. Through these assignments (such as that of children raising their schoolbooks into the air, in the Soviet spirit), Lola learned how to compose. She took photographs of piles of newspapers, bags of wheat, close-ups of machine parts, and abstract



Front covers of *El Maestro Rural*, 1936, photomontage and photographs by Lola Alvarez Bravo, University of Arizona Library

capital, y Natalia Baquedano, queretana que destacó, además de retratista, como una de las primeras dedicadas a la fotografía de publicidad.¹⁵ Tina Modotti, a finales de los años veinte, aparece entonces como precursora del reportaje fotográfico con sus imágenes publicadas en *El Machete*, el órgano del Sindicato de Pintores y Escultores, y también tomaba fotografías para el Socorro Rojo Internacional, organización paralela al perseguido Partido Comunista, así como para *Mexican Folkways*, la revista de artes y antropología que dirigían Frances Toor y Diego Rivera. Aunque breve, la carrera de Tina Modotti abrió un cauce en el país que Lola iba a aprovechar.

Fotorreportera asignada a las revistas *Vea, Voz, Avance, Futuro, Espacio* durante dos o tres décadas, Lola Alvarez Bravo es la única mujer en acompañar a ministros en sus giras, en arrimarse la falda para escalar torres petroleras en Poza Rica

ante la mirada burlona de sindicalistas, en subirse sin miedo a una endeble avioneta para aterrizar en lugares recónditos o inaccesibles de Sonora y Chihuahua, en cruzar montes y valles a lomo de mula, para fotografiar en Papantla, por ejemplo, la bajada ritual de los campesinos del monte cargando el tronco sagrado, el sacrificio del borrego, la peregrinación, sabiendo prescindir de la elegante danza, del vuelo alrededor del palo.

No se limita a ello, en sus ratos de ocio, retrata a sus amigos, pintores, músicos y poetas, intelectuales y políticos (algunas veces son los mismos), visitantes ilustres (Tony Lujan, el esposo de Mabel Dodge, Marion Greenwood [Lámina 22], Ione Robinson, Paul Strand, León Trotsky y sus secretarios, André Breton y su entonces esposa, Jacqueline Lamba). Lola Alvarez Bravo también va a ser fotógrafa predilecta de los pintores de murales y de caballete, lo que la llevaría a dirigir el taller de fotografía del Instituto Nacional de Bellas

compositions — but always with social meaning. Her first photomontages appeared on the covers of the magazine.

Lola Alvarez Bravo was not the first woman photographer in Mexico. Since the mid-nineteenth century, various women had studied photography in art and trade schools and even exhibited their work at the Academy of San Carlos. Some were more than amateurs. They worked anonymously and discretely in photographic studios, performing the grueling tasks of the laboratory and arranging mannered poses for *carte de visite* portraits. A few emerged from that anonymity: Victoria Torres worked in her brothers' studio on the Callejón de Progreso in Toluca in 1876, later located at No. 2, Calle de La Profesa in the capital, under the name Torres and Flores; Natalia Baquedano, originally from Querétaro, became an accomplished portraitist and perhaps the first Mexican woman to work in advertising photography.¹⁵ And, by the end of the twenties, Tina Modotti emerged as a pioneer in photojournalism with the images she published in *El Machete*, the official newspaper of the Union of Painters and Sculptors. She also took photographs for International Red Aid, an organization affiliated with the heavily persecuted Mexican Communist Party, and for *Mexican Folkways*, the magazine of art and anthropology edited by Frances Toor and Diego Rivera. Although her career was brief, Tina Modotti blazed a trail in Mexico, one which Lola Alvarez Bravo would follow.

As a photojournalist for such magazines as *Vea, Voz, Avance, Futuro*, and *Espacio*, Lola was the only woman following government ministers on their official tours: she was the only one hiking up her skirt to climb oil derricks in Poza Rica despite the amused stares of the union workers; the only one climbing aboard a rickety plane to land in lost, inaccessible towns in Sonora and Chihuahua; and the only one riding a mule to the town of Papantla, Veracruz, to photograph the ritual ceremonies surrounding the famed Dance of the Voladores. There she photographed the procession carrying the sacred pole down from the mountain, the sacrifice of a sheep, and the pilgrimage but was wise enough to avoid the oft-depicted dance itself.

But that was not all. In her spare time, Lola took pictures of her friends, of painters, musicians, and poets, of intellectuals and politicians (sometimes the same person), of visitors from abroad (Tony Lujan, the husband of Mabel Dodge; painters Marion Greenwood [Plate 22] and Ione Robinson; Leon Trotsky and his secretaries; André Breton and his then wife, Jacqueline Lamba). For almost thirty years, Lola Alvarez Bravo was also the chosen photographer of mural and easel painters,¹⁶ and her success here led her to eventually direct the photographic workshop at the National



Tina Modotti
Hands of the Puppeteer, 1929
Center for Creative Photography

Institute of Fine Arts. During the term of Benito Coquet as head of the Institute, Lola was hired to curate traveling exhibitions circulated to various provincial cities in one of the first attempts to decentralize culture in Mexico. This experience brought her to open her own commercial art gallery, the Galería de Arte Contemporáneo, at No. 12, Calle de Amberes in the Zona Rosa in 1951. There, she gave Frida Kahlo her first solo exhibition in Mexico, just a few months before the painter's death.



Lola Alvarez Bravo
Tony Lujan, 1940
 Center for Creative Photography

Artes.¹⁶ Durante la gestión de Benito Coquet en el Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, se le encargó asimismo organizar exposiciones itinerantes por varias ciudades de la provincia, en uno de los primeros intentos de descentralización de la cultura en México. Posteriormente en 1951 abrió su propia Galería de Arte Contemporáneo, en la calle de Amberes número 12. Ahí expondrá por primera vez Frida Kahlo algunos meses antes de su fallecimiento.

5.

A lo largo de cincuenta años de vida profesional, al margen de “sus chambas”, Lola Alvarez Bravo conservó imágenes que, por una u otra razón, la complacían, reflejaban su sentir personal y no cabían dentro de los encargos dirigidos. No son, muchas veces, sus fotografías más aparatosas, y su lectura requiere, tal vez, de cierta concentración. Porque no documentan nada y porque sus composiciones de luces y sombras entreveradas no resisten la reproducción fotomecánica, su espacio privilegiado es la galería. Con mucho cuidado y un sentido autocrítico poco común, Lola seleccionó, entre los varios centenares de negativos que llenan las gavetas de su casa, unas doscientas imágenes aisladas, recogidas en todos los caminos de México a lo largo de cinco décadas. Algunas ya son muy antiguas, otras fueron tomadas hace unos cuantos años; pero todas tienen en común una misma manera de ver que las identifica. Estas —y sólo éstas— conforman la “obra” de Lola Alvarez Bravo.

Un análisis comprensivo, sin embargo, debe tomar en cuenta la parte oculta, los miles de fotografías que conforman el ejercicio de un oficio, una práctica cotidiana. Lola Alvarez Bravo comentó algunos de estos episodios en las “memorias” que dictó a José Joaquín Blanco, Luis Zapata y Manuel Fernández Perera en 1979, pero sin insistir —e incluso negando— su valor intrínseco. Algunas de estas imágenes fueron, sin embargo, incluidas en la exposición retrospectiva de su obra que organizó el Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo en la ciudad de México en 1992. Abarcan desde fotografías de arquitectura, publicidad para diversas empresas comerciales, fotografía de moda y una gran diversidad de reportajes.

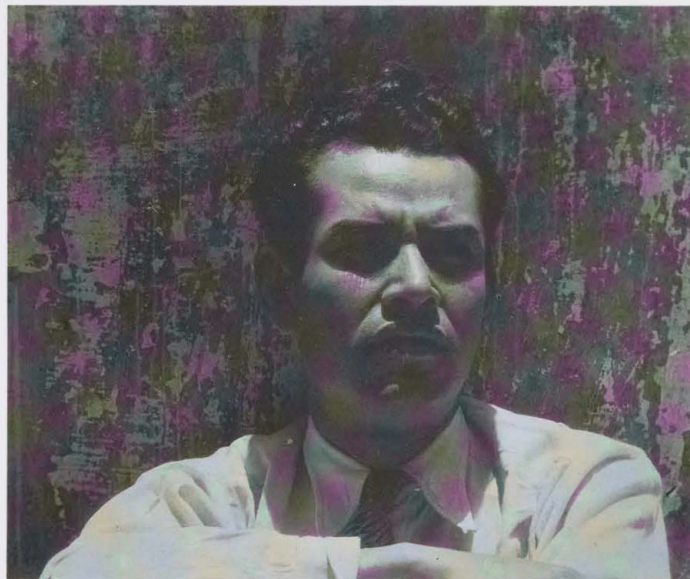
En algunas fotografías de publicidad —hasta la fecha desconocidas y nunca publicadas con su nombre— Lola Alvarez Bravo exploró las posibilidades de composición: en estas “naturalezas muertas” artificiales, muy sofisticadas (el producto, marca de cigarrillos, perfume, mueble de diseño moderno, etc., lo pedía), revela una precisa lectura de similares imágenes publicadas en revistas de moda europeas o neoyorquinas. Quizás valga la pena insistir aquí, de cualquier modo, en la precisión, en la rara elegancia de la iluminación, y en los efectos de claroscuro. Realizadas en estudio, estas fotografías permitieron a Lola Alvarez Bravo analizar con minucia la manera en que la luz, precisamente dosificada, esculpe las formas.¹⁷ Aun en este campo reglamentado, Lola Alvarez Bravo inventa —en México por lo menos— una manera de ver distinta: se servirá de esta lección en muchas de sus imágenes, y particularmente en sus estudios de desnudo,

5.

During fifty years of professional work, what she called her “little jobs,” Lola kept certain photographs that, for one reason or another, pleased her, and reflected her personal views — photographs that somehow did not fit within her more rigid assignments. For the most part, these are not her flashiest images: their reading requires, perhaps, a certain concentration. Because they were not intended to document and because her subtle compositions of light and filtered shadows suffer in reproduction, they are better understood on the gallery wall rather than the printed page. With great care and an uncommon self-critical sense, Lola selected a small portion of the images from the thousands of negatives that filled cardboard boxes and file cabinets in her apartment, the results of her forays along the roads of Mexico over the past five decades. Whether very old or more recent, they all share the same way of seeing. These — and only these — constitute what Lola Alvarez Bravo considered the true heart of her life’s work.

A comprehensive analysis, however, would have to consider the hidden part of Lola’s archive, the thousands of images that entail the daily practice of a professional: fashion and advertising photography, architectural studies, photojournalism, etc. Lola Alvarez Bravo discussed several of these assignments in a series of interviews conducted by José Joaquín Blanco, Luis Zapata, and Manuel Fernández Perera in 1979, but without insisting on — and even denying — their intrinsic value. Nevertheless, several of these images were included in the retrospective exhibition that the Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo in Mexico City organized in 1992.

In some of her advertising photographs — still relatively unknown and never credited at the time of their first publication — Lola explored the possibilities of composition. Her artificial still lifes, as sophisticated as the products (cigarettes, perfumes, modern furniture) represented, reveal a careful reading of similar images in stylish magazines published in Europe and New York. Created in the studio, such photographs allowed Lola to carefully analyze the ways in which measured light sculpts physical form. It is worth emphasizing their precision, their rare elegance of illumination and chiaroscuro effects.¹⁷ Even in the rigidly controlled arena of commercial photography, Lola Alvarez Bravo established a new way of seeing (new for Mexico, at least). The lessons learned influenced many of her subsequent images, particularly her nudes, both female and male (another first in Mexican photography). In her *Tríptico de los mártires* [Triptych of



Lola and/or Manuel Alvarez Bravo
Rufino Tamayo, ca. 1934
Center for Creative Photography

Martyrdoms], 1949 (Plate 14 shows one of the three), taken on a beach in Acapulco, she explored the sensual effects of light and shadow, revealing debts to the work of Edward Weston.

In 1935, Lola was still living in the house of María Izquierdo, just behind the plaza of Santo Domingo, a few steps from the University and the Academy of San Carlos. At the time, there were few meeting places for intellectuals in a city that was beginning to expand and discover a new self-identity. Every night, or so it seemed, María’s house was filled with students, politicians, writers, and painters. They arrived after classes were over, when offices closed, or even later, when the cafés and restaurants threw out their last lingering customers. Among the most frequent visitors were Rufino Tamayo, Luis Cardoza y Aragón, Xavier Villaurrutia, Leopoldo Méndez, and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

Lola and María were part of the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (LEAR; League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists) from its creation in 1934 and actively participated in the organization’s many events. Through the LEAR, working with the painter, engraver, and photographer Emilio Amero, Lola and Manuel Alvarez Bravo organized

tanto femenino como masculino (una novedad, entonces, en la fotografía mexicana). En su *Tríptico de los mártires*, 1949 (Lámina 14), particularmente, tomado en una playa de Acapulco, quiso ahondar en estos efectos sensoriales de luz y sombra, que algo deben a obras tempranas de Weston.

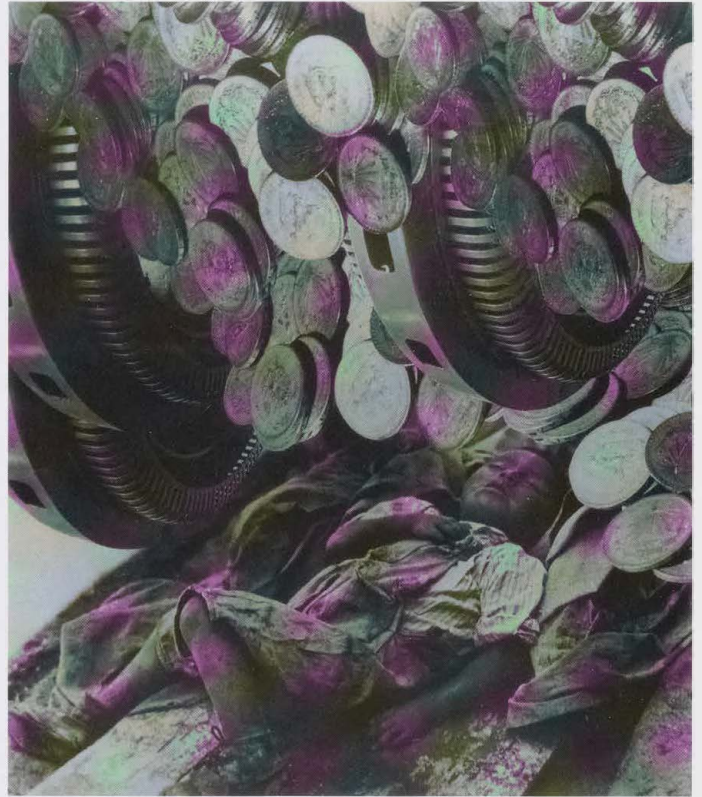
En 1935 Lola vivía en casa de María Izquierdo, a espaldas de la plaza de Santo Domingo, a un paso de la Universidad y a otro de la Academia de San Carlos. No había muchos centros de reunión para los intelectuales en aquella ciudad que empezaba a crecer y se descubría a sí misma. Todas, o casi todas las noches, la casa de María se llenaba de estudiantes, de políticos, de escritores y de pintores. Llegaban después de clases, al cierre de las oficinas o más tarde, cuando los escasos cafés y las fondas corrían a los últimos clientes. Entre los más asiduos, Rufino Tamayo, Luis Cardoza y Aragón, Xavier Villaurrutia, Leopoldo Méndez, David Alfaro Siqueiros.

Lola y María formaban parte de la Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios (LEAR) desde su creación en 1934, y participaban activamente en las actividades del grupo. Junto con el pintor, grabador y fotógrafo Emilio Amero, Lola y Manuel Álvarez Bravo crearon entonces un cine-club (quizás el primero registrado en México) y exhibían, entre otras cosas, películas que les proporcionaba discretamente el gobierno soviético: *Octubre*, *La Madre*, *La infancia de Iván*. Pudovkin, Eisenstein, Dziga Vertov, Luis Buñuel inclusive, fueron conocidos en México por este conducto.¹⁸

María Izquierdo también daba clases de dibujo, y encabezó en 1935 un proyecto de fomento a la pintura entre las mujeres. Organizó paralelamente una primera muestra de carteles de propaganda realizados por algunas de sus discípulas: la exposición *Carteles revolucionarios de las pintoras del sector femenino de la Sección de Artes Plásticas, Departamento de Bellas Artes*, se inauguró en Guadalajara en mayo.¹⁹ Lola Álvarez Bravo participó en la muestra con dos fotomontajes: el primero representaba a un “fifi”, un elegante de la época, con una calavera en vez de cabeza, y chorros de monedas en las manos; el otro se llama *El sueño de los pobres*.²⁰

A veces quería decir algo, y la fotografía no me lo permitía — explica Lola Álvarez Bravo —. Entonces tomaba una cartulina, hacía un boceto, escogía unos negativos, los imprimía al tamaño necesario, cortaba y pegaba.²¹

El sueño de los pobres es una imagen elocuente por su misma sencillez: una extraña máquina de fabricar monedas desciende sobre un niño harapiento que duerme.



Lola Álvarez Bravo
El sueño de los pobres, 1949
The Dream of the Poor

Lola Álvarez Bravo presentó posteriormente una fotografía con ese mismo título, tomada en algún tianguis, que muestra a un niño dormido entre pilas de huaraches (Lámina 10). La composición de ambas imágenes es similar: el amontonamiento de zapatos corresponde espacialmente a la agresiva máquina productora. Aunque menos impactante, la fotografía es tan sugestiva como el fotomontaje.

Hay que atribuir la breve incursión de Lola Álvarez Bravo en el terreno del fotomontaje al clima moral e ideológico de los años del cardenismo: la necesidad de llevar el discurso cultural a todas las esferas del país, sobre todo a las clases menos favorecidas, impulsó a la vez un segundo renacer del muralismo. La educación plástica para niños y adultos formaba parte de la polémica sobre la implantación de la escuela socialista en el país. Desde los días del movimiento treinta-treintista (1929), el cartel de propaganda realizado por artistas se había convertido en una potente arma de lucha, más eficaz que el periódico o que la pintura mural. Diversos artistas gráficos se unieron en torno a Leopoldo Méndez para crear

a “cine-club” (perhaps the first in Mexico) and screened, among other works, films that the Soviet government discreetly lent.¹⁸ Mexican audiences finally had the chance to see the work of Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Vertov, and Buñuel.

In 1935, María Izquierdo, who also worked part time giving drawing classes, headed a project teaching painting to women. During this time, she organized an exhibition of propaganda posters created by several of her students: *Revolutionary Posters from the Painters of the Women's Group of the Section of Plastic Arts of the National Institute of Fine Arts* opened in Guadalajara in May.¹⁹ Lola Alvarez Bravo participated in this show with two of her earliest photomontages: one parodied a *flfi*, an elegant dandy of the time, with a skull in place of his head, holding fistfuls of coins; the other was entitled *El sueño de los pobres* [The Dream of the Poor].²⁰ “Sometimes I wanted to say something, and photography didn’t fully allow me to do it,” Lola recalled. “So I’d take a sheet of cardboard, make a drawing, select the negatives, print them the necessary size, then cut and paste.”²¹

The eloquence of *El sueño de los pobres* rests in its own simplicity: a bizarre money-making machine descends upon a ragged child lying on the ground. Lola Alvarez Bravo would later exhibit an unmanipulated photograph with the same title, taken in a rural market of a child sleeping amid rows of traditional huaraches (Plate 10). The elements in both images are similar: the piles of huaraches correspond spatially to the aggressive, productive machine. Although less dramatic, the photograph is as suggestive as the photomontage.

One can attribute Lola’s preliminary incursion into photomontage to the moral and intellectual climate that flourished during the administration of General Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40). The perceived need to bring cultural discourse to all sectors of the nation, especially to the lower classes, brought a resurgence in mural painting, and new programs in socialist education, including art education for children and adults. Since the days of the *treinta-treintista* art movement of the late twenties, propaganda posters by artists had been transformed into a powerful weapon, more efficient than newspapers or murals. This medium was developed further by the artists who joined in 1937 to form the Taller de Gráfica Popular, a collaborative graphic arts workshop dedicated to fighting fascism and local entrenched powers. In this context, photomontage served as a potent ideological weapon.

But Lola Alvarez Bravo’s initiative inspired few followers, in part, perhaps, because *El sueño de los pobres* was not a purely discursive image, but rather one which played with emotive iconographic elements. After this, she continued to

create photomontages, but now simply to amuse herself, as she later confessed, or on assignment. One of these “amusements” is *El sueño del ahogado* [The Dream of the Drowned One], ca. 1936, designed as a play on her portrait of the young painter Juan Soriano, one of Lola’s closest friends. Here, as in *El sueño de los pobres*, Lola tried to preserve photographic depth, despite the abrupt shifts in scale. The work also recalls the surrealist collages that Mexican artist Agustín Lazo was producing at about the same time, images which incorporated fragments of nineteenth-century engravings.

Lola Alvarez Bravo waited several years before returning to photomontage: her known later works in this medium were probably completed in the late forties and early fifties. Unlike the earlier photomontages, these are neither surrealist exercises nor explicitly ideological statements. Commissioned by diverse businesses or institutions, they resemble advertising posters and were planned for display in a large format.

Yet her technique remained unchanged. Lola Alvarez Bravo always worked with her own negatives, rarely (perhaps incidentally) including imagery taken from other publications. She did not pretend to modify reality, only to complement it, to present an ideal dimension that the camera could not offer.

6.

In the twentieth century, photographers have adopted the use of black and white as a type of classicism. Closer to drawing or printmaking than to painting, it preserves a “documentary” ideal imposed by chromatic limitations, and also obliges the photographer to pay more attention to form, to construct pictures with light and shadow. The objects exist in the image thanks to light; it is not the volume itself but rather the contrast between illumination and darkness that organizes the composition. The professional assignments of Lola Alvarez Bravo brought her into continual contact with painters. And as she photographed their works for the National Institute of Fine Arts or took details of murals for their reproduction in books, Lola discovered the mechanisms that control composition, assimilating the rules of drawing that she used in her own work.

Lola Alvarez Bravo’s photographs reveal an ongoing search for strong diagonal axes: in *El Rapto* [Rapture] (Plate 27) and *11 a.m.*, for example, shadows projected by objects situated outside the camera’s view collide with visible elements. These two silhouettes do not fully overlap; rather, the

el Taller de Gráfica Popular. En ese contexto, el fotomontaje también podía ser un arma ideológica.

Pero la iniciativa de Lola Alvarez Bravo no tuvo, aparentemente, ningún eco. En parte, quizás, porque *El sueño de los pobres* no era una imagen puramente discursiva, sino que jugaba con elementos iconográficos emotivos. Después de este intento, siguió realizando fotomontajes para divertirse, según ella confesaba, o por encargo.

Un poco posterior, *El sueño del ahogado*, ca. 1936, no fue publicado, hasta donde se sabe. Se trata de un divertimento realizado a partir de un retrato de Juan Soriano — uno de los mejores amigos de Lola en esta época — y recuerda por su factura, los collages surrealistas que en estas mismas fechas realizaba Agustín Lazo a partir de grabados y de ilustraciones del siglo pasado. Aquí, como en *El sueño de los pobres*, Lola Alvarez Bravo intenta conservar la profundidad fotográfica no obstante las rupturas de escala.

Lola Alvarez Bravo tardó varios años antes de volver a realizar montajes: los siguientes que se conocen fueron probablemente realizados a finales de los años cuarenta y a principios de los cincuenta. A diferencia de los anteriores, no son ejercicios surrealistas, ni exponen algún contenido ideológico. Solicitados por diversas empresas o instituciones se asimilan a carteles publicitarios.

Sin embargo, su técnica nunca cambió. Lola Alvarez Bravo siempre trabajó con sus propios negativos y sólo incidentalmente utilizó en sus fotomontajes imágenes tomadas de publicaciones. No pretendía modificar la realidad, sino complementarla: presentar una dimensión ideal que la cámara no le ofrecía.

6.

Los fotógrafos han adoptado, en el siglo XX, el blanco y negro como una especie de clasicismo. Más próximo al dibujo o al grabado, preserva la idea “documental” impuesta por las limitaciones cromáticas, obliga además al fotógrafo a cuidar más la forma, a construir — con sombras y luces — verdaderos cuadros. Los objetos existen en la imagen gracias a la luz, pero no son los volúmenes en sí, sino los contrastes entre zonas iluminadas y zonas oscuras las que organizan la composición. Las “chambas” de Lola Alvarez Bravo la llevaron a estar en contacto continuo con pintores. Cuando fotografiaba sus cuadros para el Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes o cuando “recomponía” murales para su reproducción en libros, Lola descubrió los mecanismos que rigen la composición, asimiló reglas dibujísticas que utilizaría en su propia obra.

Lola Alvarez Bravo busca líneas de fuerza precisas: en *El Rapto* (Lámina 27) y *11 a.m.*, por ejemplo, las sombras proyectadas por objetos situados fuera del campo de la cámara se juxtaponen a los objetos visibles. Las dos “proyecciones” no concuerdan, pero las zonas oscuras recortan las masas, crean un ambiente que se prolonga hacia afuera de la imagen. Las sombras de las palmas sobre los rostros transforman a unas prostitutas de Acapulco en anónimos cuerpos desalmados (*Tríptico de los martirios*). Una luz sesgada esculpe en la oscuridad los rasgos de Luis Cardoza y Aragón, y convierte el simple retrato posado en una elaborada fotografía. En otras imágenes que funcionan como “paisajes interiores” las texturas diferenciadas, nítidas y controladas, desprenden una atmósfera muy personal y reflejan, tal vez de modo más entrañable, ciertas obsesiones de Lola. Los contrastes no rasgan violentamente el ojo, por el contrario, la mirada se desliza suavemente sobre la fina arena que cubre a media a la garza muerta de *Homenaje* (Lámina 13).²² La cal que riega el overol del pintor trepado en un andamio lo confunde con el muro. Las raíces entrelazadas de una ceiba se vuelven formas fantásticas, zoomórficas.

Lola Alvarez Bravo deja que la realidad se imponga a su lente. Su propia presencia apenas aflora. Fotografía comúnmente a la gente de espaldas o de lado, sin que se entere; la sorprende en sus quehaceres domésticos, en sus gestos cotidianos, en sus ensueños. Ese distanciamiento voluntario — que no anula la subjetividad — no se traduce en imágenes frías e impersonales, sino que ahonda en la intimidad. La mirada reflexiva de Lola Alvarez Bravo es siempre respetuosa, profundamente humana. Se detiene sobre los seres con una ternura que imprime a sus fotografías una sinceridad poco común. Es la mirada de un testigo fiel que pretende transmitir sin artificios lo que ve y lo que siente.

7.

Cuando yo era niña me enseñaban a servir el té, a hacer pasteles y platillos franceses que, de tan decorados, se volvían infames y nadie quería probar. Nada de eso me gustaba. Se suponía que yo debía saber esas cosas porque era *señorita*, pero a mí me parecían denigrantes. También querían que aprendiera a tocar el piano. Yo sabía lo que iba a pasar: en las fiestas tendría que tocar para que los demás brincaran. Entonces dije que no. Dije que en todo caso yo también quería brincar.²³

Lola Alvarez Bravo pertenece a una generación de mujeres

dark zones cut through the masses, creating an atmosphere that extends beyond the image itself. In the *Tríptico de los martirios*, the shadows of palm trees falling across faces transform a group of Acapulco prostitutes into anonymous soulless bodies. Light coming from the side sculpts the facial characteristics of Luis Cardoza y Aragón from out of the darkness and converts a simply posed portrait into a complex photograph. In other works that function as interior landscapes, her attention to diverse, precisely defined textures creates a very personal atmosphere and perhaps reflects some of Lola's obsessions in a more emotional way. Her contrasts do not provoke; on the contrary, the gaze slips softly over the image, as across the fine sand that covers part of the dead crane in *Homenaje* [Homage], 1949 (Plate 13).²² The lime that coats the overalls of a painter on his scaffold blends with the wall itself; intertwined roots of a silkwood tree become fantastic, zoomorphic forms.

Lola Alvarez Bravo accepts the reality before her lens. Her own presence is rarely felt in the image. She typically captures her subjects unaware, seen from behind or from the side; she surprises them in their domestic chores and in their daydreams. This voluntary distancing — which does not deny her subjectivity — does not translate into cold or impersonal photographs, but rather into images overwhelmed by intimacy. The reflexive vision of Lola Alvarez Bravo is always respectful, profoundly human. Never rushed, she lingers over these people with a tender gaze that provides her images with an uncommon frankness. They are the results of a faithful witness who communicates experience without artifice.

7.

When I was a girl, they taught me to serve tea, to make pastries and French dishes so overly decorated that they became infamous and no one dared to even taste them. I didn't enjoy any of that. It was supposed that I had to know such things because I was a *señorita*, but to me it all seemed denigrating. They also wanted me to learn how to play the piano. I knew what was going to happen; at parties I would have to play so that everyone else could jump. I said no. I said that I wanted to jump as well.²³

Lola Alvarez Bravo belongs to a generation of women educated in the years just following the Porfiriato, during the Mexican Revolution, a time still marked by nineteenth-century morality. Among the bourgeoisie, the only possible avenue for young women who lacked any formal prepara-

tion for life outside the "tasks appropriate to their sex" was marriage. By the twenties and thirties, several women had found an alternative in the role of artistic muse: María Asúnsolo, Lupe Marín, and Nahui Olín, each in her own way, opened possibilities for succeeding generations of Mexican women. Nevertheless, only Frida Kahlo, María Izquierdo, and Lola Alvarez Bravo emerged as creators in their own right, as women standing alone.

However, while Frida and María worked in their studios, surrounded by friends and relations, Lola walked by herself in the streets. "I was the only woman fooling around with a camera in the streets," Lola recalled, "and all the reporters laughed at me. So I became a fighter."²⁴ Among those reporters who harassed her was Enrique Díaz, known as "el Gordito," photographer for the weekly magazine *Mañana*.²⁵ Others, including the Hermanos Mayo, did, however, respect her work.²⁶ Lola's situation was unique: in a hostile world, one that considered her profession not only dangerous but exclusively masculine, her career developed against the current. With a rare force of will, Lola built up a body of work without letting herself be poisoned by commentaries or fashions, without losing hope — for the love of doing it.

Lola was not, nor should she be considered, a typical photojournalist. Her work is really not about the "news" in itself, but rather is largely the result of "special assignments": photographing an enormous eighteenth-century choir stall for a now rare university portfolio; illustrating the memoirs of Mexican President Manuel Avila Camacho; documenting hunger in the La Laguna region of Coahuila for the Ministry of Health; preparing, with Spanish poet Francisco Tario, a book on Acapulco for tourists; filming a documentary about Diego Rivera's murals at Chapingo; or roaming rural areas of the states of Veracruz, Tabasco, and Oaxaca to document traditional dances for the musician Carlos Jiménez Mabarak and the American dancer Ana Sokolov.

Lola always kept her married name. It was a way of recognizing her beginnings, sentimental as well as professional. With it she adopted a standard of conduct, a style, and above all, an ethic. Again and again, to all who came to interview her, Lola Alvarez Bravo would repeat the same phrase: "If my photos have any value, it's because they show a Mexico that no longer exists."

educadas en los años postreros del porfiriato, y en los primeros de la revolución, marcadas aún por la moral decimonónica. En las clases burguesas, sobre todo, el único camino posible de la emancipación para jóvenes carentes de toda formación fuera de las “labores propias de su sexo”, es el matrimonio. Ser musa de artista ofrece, en los años veinte y treinta ventajas ineludibles: María Asúnsolo, Lupe Marín, Nahui Olín, a su manera, se abren camino en el medio intelectual mexicano. Sin embargo, sólo Frida Kahlo, María Izquierdo y Lola Alvarez Bravo despuntan como auténticas creadoras, solitarias. Frida y María trabajan en su taller, rodeadas de sus amigos y de sus parientes; Lola anda sola por las calles:

Yo era la única mujer que andaba brincando con una cámara en las calles, en los desfiles deportistas y del 16 de Septiembre, y todos los reporteros se burlaban de mí. Así que me volví gallo.

Este “todos los reporteros” se refiere particularmente al “Gordito” Enrique Díaz, fotógrafo de *Mañana*, quien en varias ocasiones la agredió.²⁴ Otros, los Hermanos Mayo entre ellos, la respetaron mucho.²⁵ Pero el caso de Lola resulta de cualquier modo ejemplar: en un medio hostil, en un oficio considerado “peligroso” y, por supuesto, “masculino”, la carrera de Lola Alvarez Bravo se desarrolla a contracorriente. Con una rara fuerza de voluntad, Lola construye su obra sin dejarse contaminar por los comentarios, por las modas; sin desesperarse. Por puro gusto.

No es, ni se puede considerar, una fotorreportera típica. El rango de sus trabajos no abarca “la noticia” en sí, sino que se refiere a “encargos especiales”: reproducir la sillería del Generalito para un álbum de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México ahora muy raro, ilustrar las memorias del presidente Avila Camacho, documentar la hambruna en la región de La Laguna para la Secretaría de Salud, preparar, con el poeta español Francisco Tario un libro turístico sobre Acapulco, realizar un documental sobre los murales de Diego Rivera en Chapingo o recorrer las zonas indígenas de Veracruz, Tabasco y Oaxaca para documentar danzas tradicionales por encargo del músico Carlos Jiménez Mabarak y de la bailarina Ana Sokolov.

Conservó su apellido de casada. Era una manera de reconocer sus orígenes, no sólo sentimentales, sino profesionales también. Con ello, adoptó una línea de conducta, un estilo y, sobre todo, una ética. Una y otra vez, a todos los que la entrevistaron, Lola Alvarez Bravo repetirá la misma frase: “Si algún valor tienen mis fotos, es porque muestran un México que ya no existe”.

Postdata

Conocí a Lola Alvarez Bravo en la primavera de 1977, en un jardín de Cuernavaca. Entonces escribía un libro sobre Diego Rivera, y la escuché hablar, a la sombra de un árbol, de quien era entonces mi héroe y mi obsesión. Le solicité aquella vez una entrevista más formal. No accedió, pero tampoco se negó. Le hablé varias veces, sin resultado. Volví a verla por fin, a finales de este año, en el Palacio de Bellas Artes, en la inauguración de una muestra retrospectiva de Diego Rivera. Andaba con bastón, y nos sentamos un buen rato en las escaleras de mármol, apartados de la multitud. Comentamos el atuendo de María Felix, que andaba por ahí con presidente y ministros. Fue Lola quien, esta vez, me pidió que le hablara. Algunos días después, grabadora en una mano, libreta de apuntes en la otra, entré por primera vez en el oscuro departamento de Avenida Juárez 135, donde vivió durante más de cincuenta años.

Casi nadie, con excepción de algunos amigos íntimos, conocía — o mejor dicho, recordaba — su trabajo fotográfico. Su última exposición se había efectuado en el Palacio de Bellas Artes en 1965: 100 retratos de figuras de las artes en México. En aquella ocasión se había negado, en uno de sus típicos actos de brava rebeldía, a agregar el del entonces presidente Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. Estos pequeños detalles pueden descalificar a un artista en México. No fue el caso esta vez. Las obras de Lola se habían hundido en el olvido por su modestia, más bien, y por un prurito que nunca logró superar: la inevitable comparación, la incontenible competencia con Manuel Alvarez Bravo.

Lola me enseñó partes de su trabajo, las impresiones que conservaba en sus cajas de cartón grises y amarillas. No eran muchas entonces. Lola casi no tomaba fotografías desde que había sufrido un infarto, a finales de 1961, que la obligó a cerrar su galería y a vender al Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes su colección de negativos de reproducciones de obras de arte (contenía, por derecho de herencia, clichés que José María Lupercio había cedido a Tina Modotti, negativos de la misma Tina, y quizás de Weston también, y algunos indiferenciados Manuel/Lola Alvarez Bravo). En estos quince o dieciséis años, hasta que Eugenia Meyer y Claudia Canales se interesaron por su trabajo cuando realizaron la exposición *Imagen histórica de la fotografía en México* en el Castillo de Chapultepec, Lola se había mantenido al margen de la actividad profesional, y de la pública. Frecuentaba algunos pocos amigos, Rodolfo “El Loco” Ayala, particularmente, quien vivía entonces en Cuernavaca en casa de José y Lupe Muñoz; Rufino y Olga Tamayo, compañeros de toda la vida; Ana

Postscript

I met Lola Alvarez Bravo in the spring of 1977, in a garden in Cuernavaca. I was then writing a book on Diego Rivera, and I listened to her talking in the shade about a man who was then my hero and my obsession. I asked her if she would grant me a more formal interview. She didn't agree, but she didn't say no either. Various phone calls led nowhere. Finally, I met her again, at the end of that year, at the opening of a Diego Rivera retrospective in the Palace of Fine Arts. She was walking with a cane, and we sat for a while on the marble steps of the museum, apart from the crowds. We commented upon what María Felix was wearing as she strolled past, accompanied by the President and government ministers. This time, it was Lola who suggested that I call her. A few days later, tape recorder in one hand and notebook in the other, I first entered the poorly lit apartment at No. 135, Avenida Juárez, where she had lived for more than fifty years.

Almost no one, with the exception of a few of her close friends, knew — or should I say, remembered — her photographic work. Her last exhibition had been held in the Palace of Fine Arts in 1965: one hundred portraits of the Mexican cultural elite. On that occasion, she had refused, in one of her typically brave and rebellious moments, to include a portrait of then President, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. Such acts can destroy an artist in Mexico, but in this case nothing happened. Rather, Lola's photographs had been forgotten more due to her own modesty and to something that she could never overcome: the inevitable comparisons with and the uncontrollable competition of Manuel Alvarez Bravo.

Lola showed me some of her work, the prints she kept in gray and yellow cardboard boxes. She had taken few pictures since suffering a heart attack in late 1961, an event that forced her to close her gallery and sell her collection of negatives of art reproductions to the National Institute of Fine Arts.²⁷ Until Eugenia Meyer and Claudia Canales became interested in her work for an exhibition they were organizing for the Castillo de Chapultepec in 1977, entitled *Imagen histórica de la fotografía en México*, Lola had remained on the margins of professional activity and public recognition. She visited a few friends, particularly Rodolfo "El Loco" Ayala, who lived in the Cuernavaca home of José and Lupe Muñoz; Rufino and Olga Tamayo, her lifetime companions; Ana Benítez; Antonio Peláez; and Fernando and María de la Páz Canales. She went out a lot, never missing the opening of a new play or a film premiere. She read three daily papers and all the recent books. She knew who was

who, and she could talk about anything.

I thought Lola Alvarez Bravo's photographs merited an exhibition, that they deserved to be seen and recognized. I conceived of a show for the Alianza Francesa in Polanco. Lola resisted, but in the process of creating that exhibition we began to form a particular friendship and an enormous dependence on each other — in our conversations, in our trips to the movies, to the theater, in the late night dinners at the home of José Joaquín Blanco described by Luis Zapata,²⁸ in our never-ending interview, now without tape recorder or notebook. It was a type of intellectual *noviazgo*, a sort of courtship, one might say; by Lola's side, with Lola, I constructed a book, *Figuras en el trópico*, that may contain my own opinions, but that should be read as a collaborative work (how many times I'd call her at two in the morning to ask to clarify some obscure but somehow relevant detail.)

Things began to change. The Fondo de Cultura Económica, one of Mexico's largest publishers, under the direction of historian José Luis Martínez, commissioned a book of her portraits of Mexican writers. The Ministry of Public Education offered her an exhibition entitled *De las humildes cosas*. Lola returned to her darkroom, more or less adequately installed in her tiny crowded kitchen. She began to reorganize her archive, she found forgotten images, negatives that had never even been printed. Her life's work began to take form.

Only once did I watch Lola develop her prints. She performed strange maneuvers in the dark — not just those that require light-sensitive papers and strong-smelling corrosive chemicals. She grasped a talisman in her closed hand and passed it over the still white paper, murmuring to herself. When the image finally appeared on the paper, she lifted her head proudly and shouted, triumphantly, "It came out!" Photography was, perhaps always will be, a sort of magic.

The interview continued: we went to Puebla to eat *chiles en nogada* with Rogelio Cuéllar and Elvira García; to Tijuana to eat seafood at Rosarito Beach beside a gray wintry sea. God knows what we ate in Guadalajara. And in Mexico City there were meals at El Horreo with Alba and Vicente Rojo and at the cafeteria in the Regis Hotel with Margarita Mendoza López. When there were no parties or when money was scarce, there were always the salads at Vip's or the hamburgers at Shirley's. At the Sanborn's on the Calle de La Fragua, we ate with our backs to Tamayo's mural, so as not to see the splashes of ketchup on his watermelons.

September 1985: the earthquake destroyed much of the Tabacaleras neighborhood where Lola had lived since 1939. The restaurant in the Hotel New York, where she ate when she was alone, and the newspaper stand where she bought

Benítez, Antonio Peláez, María de La Paz y Fernando Canales. Salía mucho, sin embargo. No se perdía un estreno teatral, una película. Leía tres diarios y todos los libros. Sabía quién era quien, y podía hablar de todo.

Creí que las fotografías de Lola Alvarez Bravo merecían una exposición, merecían ser vistas y reconocidas. Inventé una exposición en la Alianza Francesa de Polanco. Lola se hizo rogar mucho, pero en el proceso de construcción de esta muestra, en estas charlas, en estas idas al cine, al teatro, en las desveladas en casa de José Joaquín Blanco que Luis Zapata relató en otra parte²⁶, en esta entrevista sin fin, sin grabadora ya, ni libreta de apuntes, también fuimos construyendo una amistad particular y una enorme dependencia. Una especie de noviazgo intelectual. Construí junto a Lola, con Lola, un libro, *Figuras en el trópico*, que, si bien contiene mis opiniones, debe ser leído como obra colectiva (no faltaron las veces en que le hablé a Lola, a las dos de la mañana, para preguntarle quién es fulano, de qué color era el vestido de perengana, qué camión tomabas cuando ibas a tal parte).

El Fondo de Cultura, durante la gestión de José Luis Martínez, le encargó un libro de retratos de escritores mexicanos. La Secretaría de Educación Pública le ofreció la exposición que se tituló *De las humildes cosas*. Lola volvió al laboratorio, instalado mal que bien en su diminuta y retacada cocina. Volvió a reorganizar sus negativos, encontró imágenes olvidadas, incluso algunas que nunca había impreso. Su obra se fue definiendo.

Una sola vez, entré al laboratorio mientras imprimía. Lola efectuaba extrañas manipulaciones en la penumbra. No sólo las que requieren los papeles sensibles, los productos químicos corrosivos, olorosos. Pasaba su mano cerrada sobre un talismán encima del papel aún blanco, susurrando a media voz. Cuando las sombras aparecían, finalmente sobre el papel, con orgullo, alzaba la cabeza y decía triunfante: “¡Me salió!” La fotografía era, es, quizás será siempre, magia pura.

Siguió la entrevista: fuimos a Puebla, a comer chiles en nogada, con Rogelio Cuéllar y Elvira García; a Tijuana, a comer mariscos en Rosarito, frente a un mar gris de invierno. Quién sabe qué comimos en Guadalajara. Comíamos en El Horreo, con Alba y Vicente Rojo, en la cafetería del Regis, con Margarita Mendoza López. Cuando no era fiesta o no alcanzaba el dinero, bastaban las ensaladas de Vip's o las hamburguesas de Shirley's de Reforma. En el Sanborns de La Fragua, nos sentábamos de espaldas al mural de Tamayo para no ver los salpicados de catsup sobre las sandías.

Septiembre de 1985: el sismo destruyó gran parte del barrio de Tabacaleras en el que Lola vivió desde 1939. El restaurante del hotel Nueva York donde comía cuando estaba

sola, y el puesto de periódicos donde compraba su *Excélsior* y su *Jornada*. Esa mañana del 19, no pareció haberse percatado de la amplitud del desastre. En el teléfono, dijo en voz baja: “tembló un poquito”, y luego agregó: “estoy tomando mi café”. Más tarde se interrumpieron las líneas.

La colonia fue evacuada, pero se negó a dejar su edificio. Gracias a Braulio Peralta, cuyo coche estaba — por quién sabe qué motivo — estacionado ahí cerca, Lola fue evacuada junto con su archivo fotográfico empilado, apachurrado, en dos maletas y una bolsa de mercado.

Varias semanas más tarde, cuando regresó a Avenida Juárez, todo había cambiado, y para siempre. Un año más tarde, en septiembre de 1986, Elena Poniatowska la llevó a Tlatelolco a la velada del primer aniversario del sismo de 1985. Lola llevaba su cámara y tomó algunas fotografías que sólo imprimió en forma de contactos. Esta fue, creo, la última vez. Lentamente, subrepticamente, sus ojos se fueron velando. Durante todos estos años, Lola se negó a admitir la ceguera. ¡Qué inmensa rabia!

En este México que ingresaba de la manera más violenta en la era postindustrial, se desataron las furias mistificantes. Con su sorna habitual, Lola planeaba sentarse en una sillita frente al Palacio de Bellas Artes, con un letrero que anunciara: “Aquí se cuenta la historia de México, 10,000 pesos el minuto”. Una y otra vez, fue repitiendo las mismas historias, que si Frida esto, que si Tina lo otro — no salían de ahí. Para ser honesto, debo decir que el discurso de Lola, a fuerza de tanta repetición, se fue estereotipando, consolidándose en torno a unas cuantas anécdotas que todos recogieron, iguales, y algunos adornaron, para que pareciera diferente.

La neblina perpetua fue rodeándola. El triste, lamentable y desgastante atardecer duró varios, quizás demasiados, años. El último día de julio de 1993, por fin, se rompió un tenue hilo con el pasado, y concluyó la entrevista.

Yau-tepec, Morelos
5 de agosto de 1993

her *Excélsior* and *La Jornada* were gone. On that morning of the nineteenth, no one yet realized the extent of the destruction. On the telephone, she said in a low voice, "It shook a little," later adding, "I'm having my coffee." And then the lines were cut.

Her neighborhood was evacuated, but she refused to leave her building. Thanks to Braulio Peralta, a journalist whose car was coincidentally just around the block, we convinced Lola to go, hurriedly and roughly packing her negatives into two suitcases and a shopping bag.

A few weeks later, when she returned to her apartment on the Avenida Juárez, everything had changed. A year later, in September of 1986, Elena Poniatowska took her to Tlatelolco to a ceremony honoring the first anniversary of the earthquake. Lola brought her camera and took a few pictures that she only printed as contact sheets. Those were, I believe, her last. Slowly, subtly, her eyes clouded over. But Lola Alvarez Bravo would never admit her own blindness. How utterly annoying life could be.

In the Mexico that turbulently entered the post-industrial era, mystifying furies were let loose. With her habitual sarcasm, Lola joked about sitting in front of the Palace of Fine Arts, wearing a sign around her neck that read: "Hear the history of Mexico; 10,000 pesos a minute." Again and again, she repeated the same old stories about Frida and Tina; few asked about anything else. To be honest, I noticed that Lola's recollections, in the face of so much repetition, almost became stereotypes, consolidated around a few anecdotes that everyone collected, and some embellished.

A perpetual fog began to surround her. The sad, lamentable, and tiring dusk lasted several years, perhaps too many. On the last day of July 1993, finally, a slender connection to the past was broken. The interview had ended.

Yautepec, Morelos
August 5, 1993

NOTES

¹Bambi, *Excelsior*, 18 de noviembre de 1953. (Alfonso Michel (1897-1957). Después de una larga estancia en Estados Unidos y Europa en los años 1910-1930, regresó a México y fue, con Rufino Tamayo, uno de los introductores de la geometrización a este país).

²Esta foto se llama, justamente, *Vecindad*, 1945.

³Según otras versiones, esta primera cámara, una Kodak portátil, pertenecía al medio hermano de Lola.

⁴Manuel y Lola Álvarez Bravo: *Nuevo Horizonte* (argumento cinematográfico para niños), manuscrito inédito, ca. 1930.

⁵En 1984, Lola Álvarez Bravo bautizó *De las humildes cosas* una amplia exposición de fotografías de estos personajes que se presentó en el Centro Cultural de Tijuana en 1984 (rebautizada *Elogio de la fotografía*, esta misma muestra viajó a diversas ciudades de México y a San Antonio, Texas).

⁶Lola Álvarez Bravo, comunicación personal.

⁷Entrevista con Lola Álvarez Bravo en *Lola Álvarez Bravo: Recuento fotográfico*, Ediciones Penélope, México, 1982, p. 61.

⁸En su juventud, Manuel Álvarez Bravo quiso ser músico, médico homeópata y escritor.

⁹Manuel Álvarez Bravo, comunicación personal.

¹⁰Lola Álvarez Bravo llamaba “chambas” a sus fotografías de encargo; entre éstas, sin embargo, rescató como “obras propias” numerosas imágenes.

¹¹Mildred Constantine, *Tina Modotti: una vida frágil*, Fondo de Cultura Económica, México, 1975, p. 113.

¹²Lola Álvarez Bravo, comunicación personal.

¹³Resulta muy difícil precisar exactamente la fecha de la separación de Lola y Manuel Álvarez Bravo; siguieron compartiendo cámaras y laboratorio durante varios años. Todavía a mediados de los cuarenta, abrieron en sociedad un estudio y una tienda de materiales fotográficos. Se divorciaron legalmente en 1948, cuando Manuel Álvarez Bravo se casó con Doris Heyden.

¹⁴Lola Álvarez Bravo, comunicación personal. Lola había sido contratada para clasificar las colecciones de fotografías y negativos de la Secretaría de Educación.

¹⁵Sobre los hermanos Torres, véase, *Almanaque de Pérez para el año de 1876* y *El Mundo*, 2 de junio de 1899, cit. por Juan Coronel Rivera, «El tic, 150 años de la fotografía», *unomásuno*, 14 de agosto de 1989. Sobre Natalia Baquedano (activa en los años 1890) véase Patricia Priego Ramírez y José Antonio Rodríguez, *La manera en que fuimos, Fotografía y sociedad en Querétaro, 1840-1930*, Ediciones del Estado de Querétaro, 1989.

¹⁶José María Lupercio y Tina Modotti fueron los encargados de fotografiar los murales en los años veinte. Manuel Álvarez Bravo también fotografió murales, en los años treinta. Lola lo asistía en estos encargos.

¹⁷En 1984, Lola Álvarez Bravo intentó llevar hasta sus últimas consecuencias las posibilidades de “edición” de una forma mediante la iluminación: trabajó sobre el rostro de una modelo, esculpiendo su forma con diversos tipos de iluminación. Nunca pudo concluir esta serie.

¹⁸México y la Unión Soviética habían roto sus relaciones diplomáticas

en 1929, pero la LEAR, miembro del Socorro Rojo Internacional, se dedicaba a la difusión de la cultura soviética en el país.

¹⁹«Se inauguró la Primera Exposición Femenina en ésta», *El Jalisciense*, 11 de mayo de 1935. Aparentemente la muestra iba a ser itinerada, pero no existen datos de que se haya presentado en alguna otra ciudad.

²⁰Estos no fueron los primeros fotomontajes realizados en México: Tina Modotti y algunos artistas plásticos (Xavier Guerrero, Jesús Guerrero Galván) hicieron algunos para el periódico comunista *El Machete* a finales de los años veinte.

²¹Lola Álvarez Bravo, comunicación personal.

²²Esta imagen fue tomada en Acapulco en 1949, la misma tarde en que Lola Álvarez Bravo supo de la muerte de su amigo Salvador Toscano en un accidente aéreo, de ahí el título de esta imagen.

²³Lola Álvarez Bravo, comunicación personal.

²⁴Enrique Díaz fue uno de los más constantes fotorreporteros de la ciudad de México entre 1920 y 1960. Su obra compleja apenas empieza a ser valorada.

²⁵Los Hermanos Mayo, así nombrados porque se juntaron durante una manifestación del Primero de Mayo en Madrid, en 1930, era una asociación de fotógrafos de prensa españoles que emigraron a México en 1939, y revolucionaron la fotografía periodística en el país.

²⁶Luis Zapata, “Primeras Imágenes” en *Lola Álvarez Bravo: fotografías selectas 1934-1985*, (México, D.F.: Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, 1992), págs. 300-307.

NOTES

- ¹ Alfonso Michel (1897–1957) was born in the state of Colima, in western Mexico. After a long stay in the United States and Europe from 1910 to 1930, he returned to Mexico and, together with Rufino Tamayo, helped introduce European geometrism.
- ² Bambi, *Excelsior* (Mexico City), November 18, 1953.
- ³ The term refers to the period from 1876 to 1910, when Mexico was ruled by General Porfirio Díaz.
- ⁴ According to other versions of the story, this first camera, a Kodak, belonged to Lola's half-brother.
- ⁵ Manuel and Lola Alvarez Bravo, *Nuevo Horizonte* [New Horizon], unpublished manuscript, ca. 1930. *Mecapaleros* carry their loads using a strap across their forehead; *pulquerías* are taverns serving *pulque*, an alcoholic beverage made from the maguey cactus.
- ⁶ Lola Alvarez Bravo titled a 1984 exhibition in Tijuana of her photographs of these characters *De las humildes cosas* [Of Humble Things]. This exhibition was retitled *Elogio de la fotografía* [Elegy to Photography] at subsequent venues.
- ⁷ Lola Alvarez Bravo, conversation with author.
- ⁸ Interview with Lola Alvarez Bravo, *Lola Alvarez Bravo: Recuento fotográfico* (México, D.F.: Ediciones Penélope, 1982), p. 61.
- ⁹ In his youth, Manuel Alvarez Bravo wanted (variously) to become a musician, a homeopathic doctor, and a writer.
- ¹⁰ Manuel Alvarez Bravo, conversation with author.
- ¹¹ Manuel Alvarez Bravo, quoted in Mildred Constantine, *Tina Modotti: A Fragile Life* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1993), p. 97.
- ¹² Lola Alvarez Bravo, conversation with author.
- ¹³ It is difficult to specify the exact date of the separation of Lola and Manuel; they continued to share cameras and a studio for several years afterwards. Even in the mid-forties, they joined together to open a commercial studio and photographic supply store. They were not legally divorced until 1948, when Manuel Alvarez Bravo married Doris Heyden.
- ¹⁴ Lola Alvarez Bravo, conversation with author.
- ¹⁵ On the Torres family, see the *Almanaque de Pérez para el año de 1876* (México, D.F.: 1876); and *El Mundo* (June 2, 1899), cited in Juan Coronel Rivera, "El tic, 150 años de la fotografía," *unomásuno* (Mexico City, August 14, 1989). On Baquedano, active in Mexico City in the 1890s, see Patricia Priego Ramírez and José Antonio Rodríguez, *La manera en que fuimos: Fotografía y sociedad en Querétaro, 1840–1930* (Querétaro: Ediciones del Estado de Querétaro, 1989).
- ¹⁶ José María Lupercio, and later Tina Modotti, were the photographers of the murals in the twenties. Manuel Alvarez Bravo also photographed murals in the thirties; Lola often assisted him on such projects.
- ¹⁷ In 1984, Lola Alvarez Bravo further examined how form is constructed through the use of light; she repeatedly photographed the face of a model, shaping its surface through various means of illumination. This series was never completed.
- ¹⁸ Mexico and the Soviet Union had broken diplomatic relations in 1929, but the LEAR, member of International Red Aid, remained dedicated to the diffusion of Soviet culture in Mexico.
- ¹⁹ "Se inauguró la Primera Exposición Femenina en ésta," *El Jaliscienses*, May 11, 1935. The show apparently traveled to other cities in Mexico.
- ²⁰ These were not the first done in Mexico: Tina Modotti and other visual artists (Xavier Guerrero, Jesús Guerrero Galván) had created photomontages for *El Machete* toward the end of the twenties.
- ²¹ Lola Alvarez Bravo, conversation with author.
- ²² Taken in Acapulco on the same afternoon that Lola Alvarez Bravo learned of the death of her close friend, the art historian Salvador Toscano, in a plane crash. The image is also known as *Homenaje a Salvador Toscano* [Homage to Salvador Toscano].
- ²³ Lola Alvarez Bravo, conversation with author.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ Díaz was one of Mexico City's leading photojournalists between 1920 and 1960; his extensive work has only recently begun to be rediscovered and analyzed.
- ²⁶ The Hermanos Mayo, named after their first reunion during a May Day rally in Madrid in 1930, was an association of Spanish press photographers who emigrated to Mexico in 1939, and radically transformed their profession in that country.
- ²⁷ This collection also included negatives which José María Lupercio had given to Tina Modotti, some of Modotti's own negatives, perhaps a few by Weston, and several taken jointly by Manuel and Lola.
- ²⁸ Luis Zapata, "Primeras Imágenes" in *Lola Alvarez Bravo: fotografías selectas 1934–1985* (México, D.F.: Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, 1992), pp. 300–307.

Plates



PLATE 1 *A ver quién me oye* (¿Me oirán?), 1939



PLATE 2 *Mujeres de Papantla, 1940s*



PLATE 3 *Entierro en Yalalag, 1946*



PLATE 4 *San Isidro Labrador*, n.d.



PLATE 5 *La patrona*, 1960s



PLATE 6 *Indiferencia*, 1940s



PLATE 7 *La Madre Matiana*, ca. 1935



PLATE 8 *Por culpas ajenas*, ca. 1945

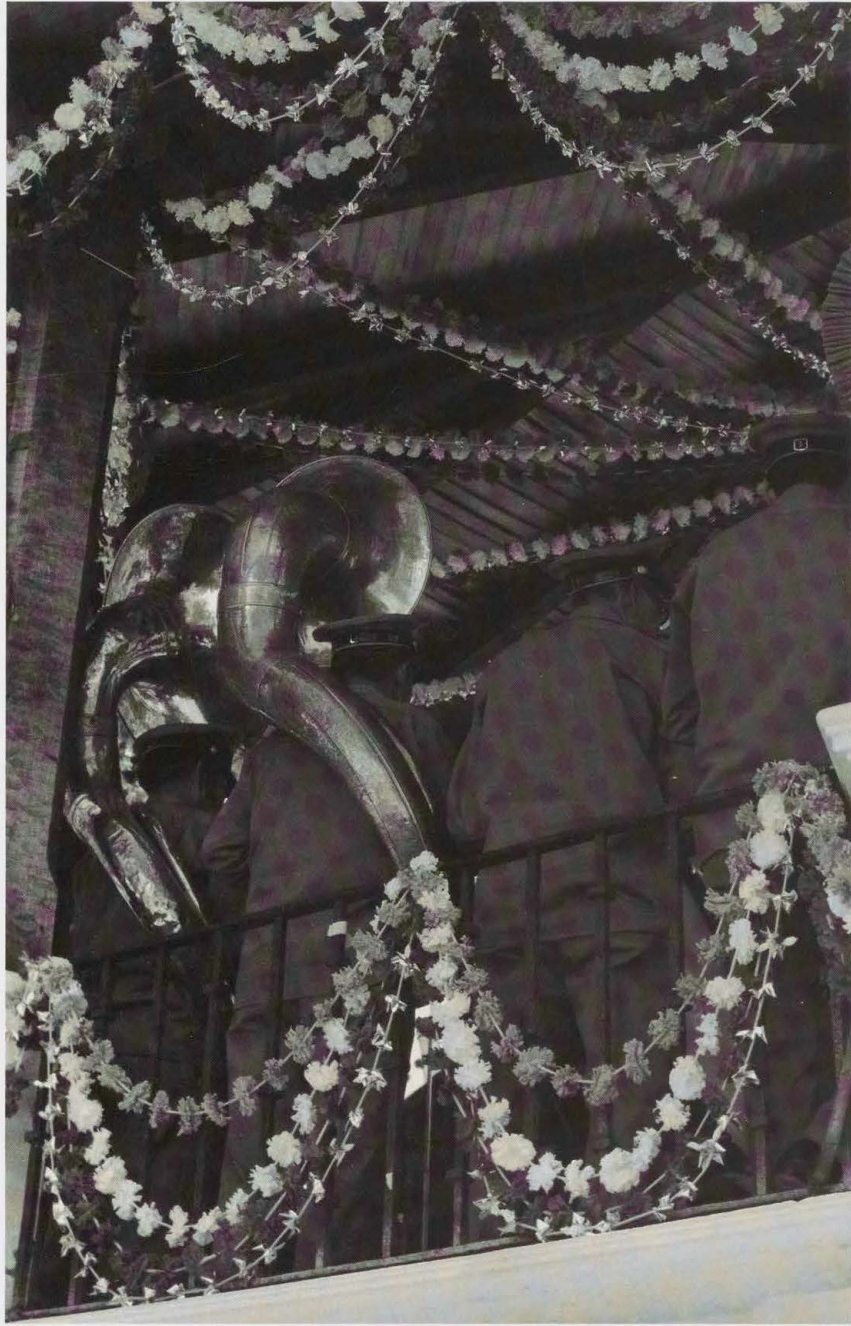


PLATE 9 *La feria*, ca. 1940



PLATE 10 *El sueño de los pobres 2*, 1949



PLATE 11 *El sueño (Isabel Villaseñor en Tenacatita, Jalisco), 1941*

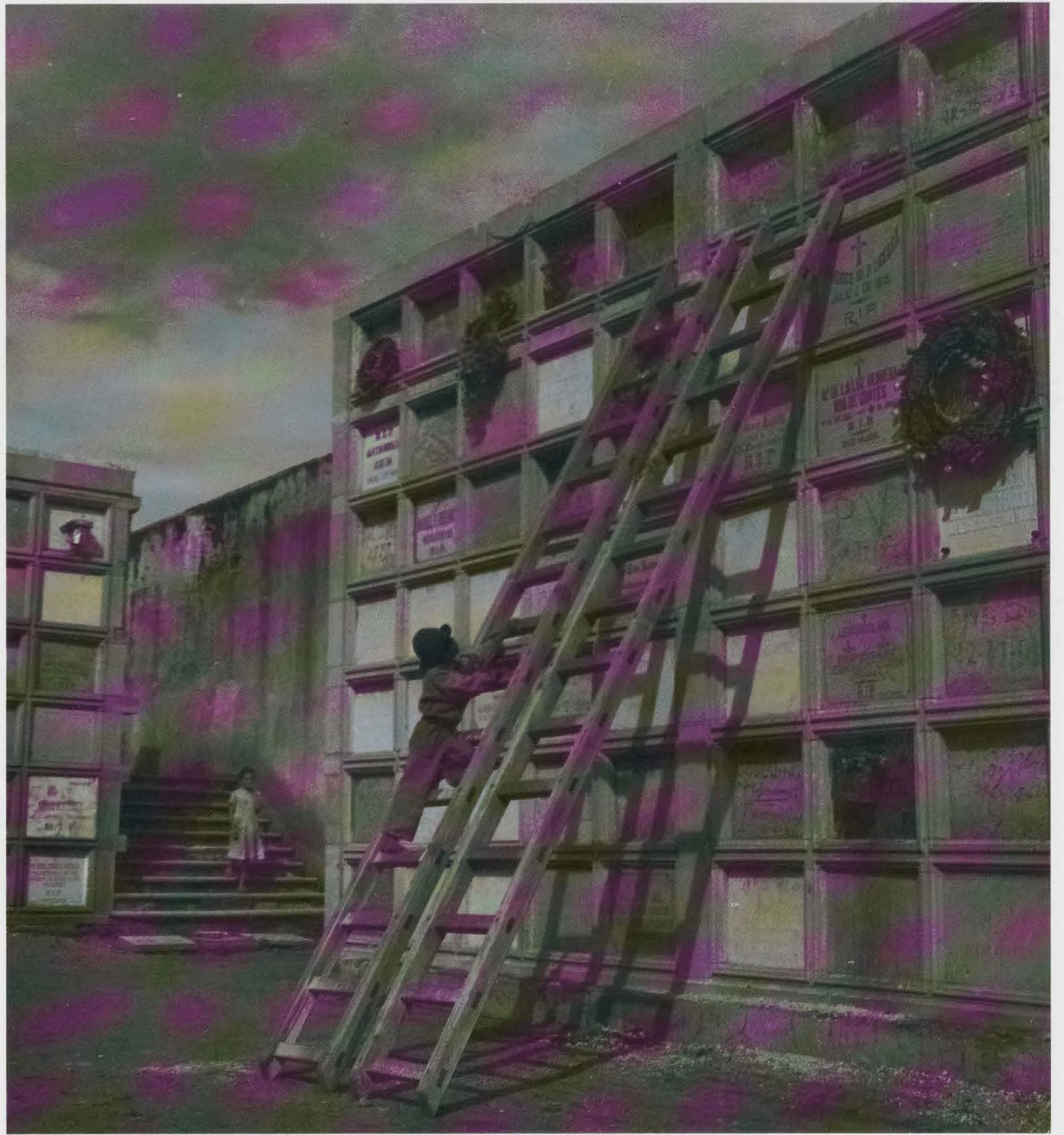


PLATE 12 *El panteoncito*, ca. 1945



PLATE 13 *Homenaje* (*Homenaje a Salvador Toscano*), 1949

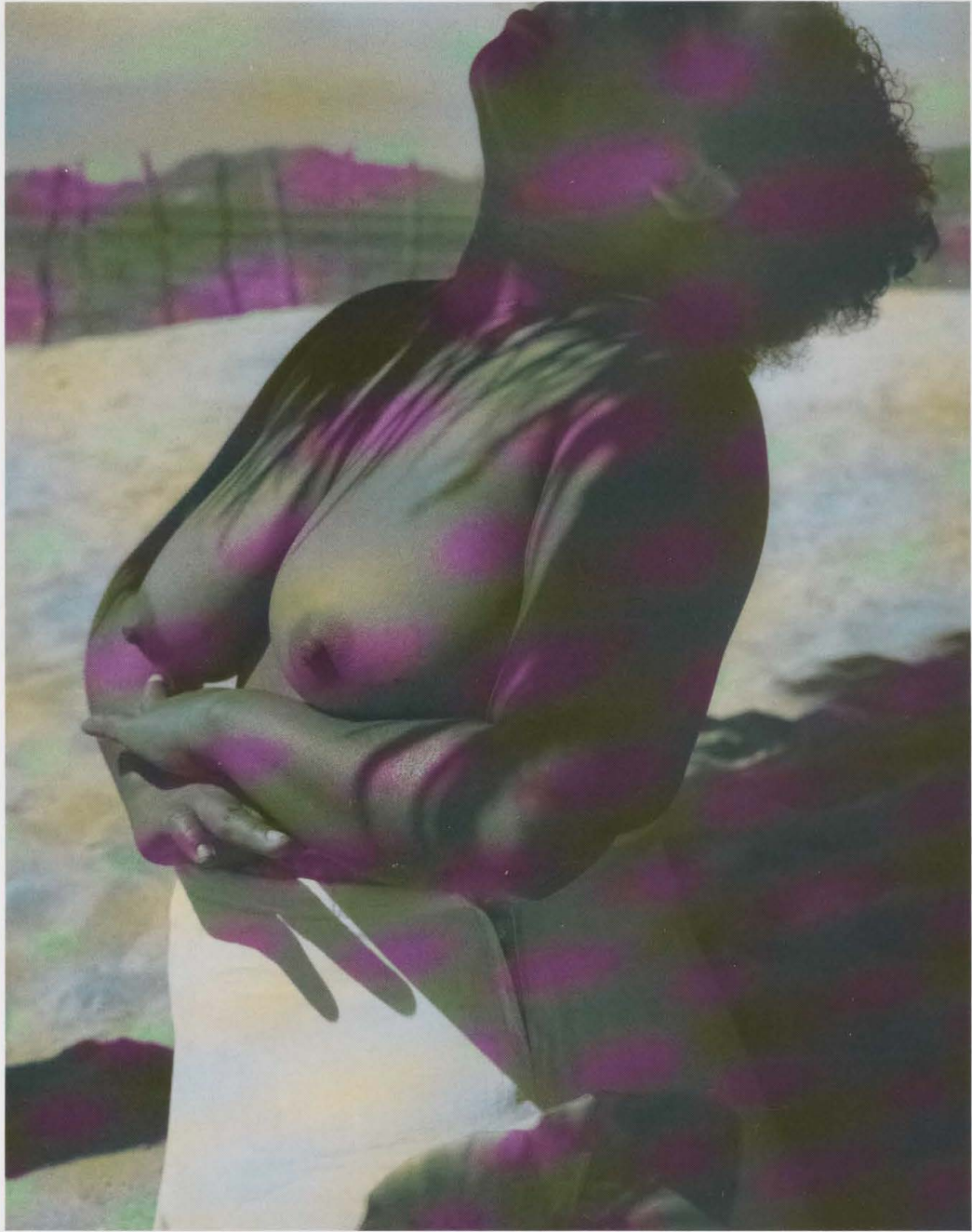


PLATE 14 *Tríptico de los matinos 3, 1949*



PLATE 15 *Las lavanderas*, ca. 1940



PLATE 16 *Baño* [variant], 1940s

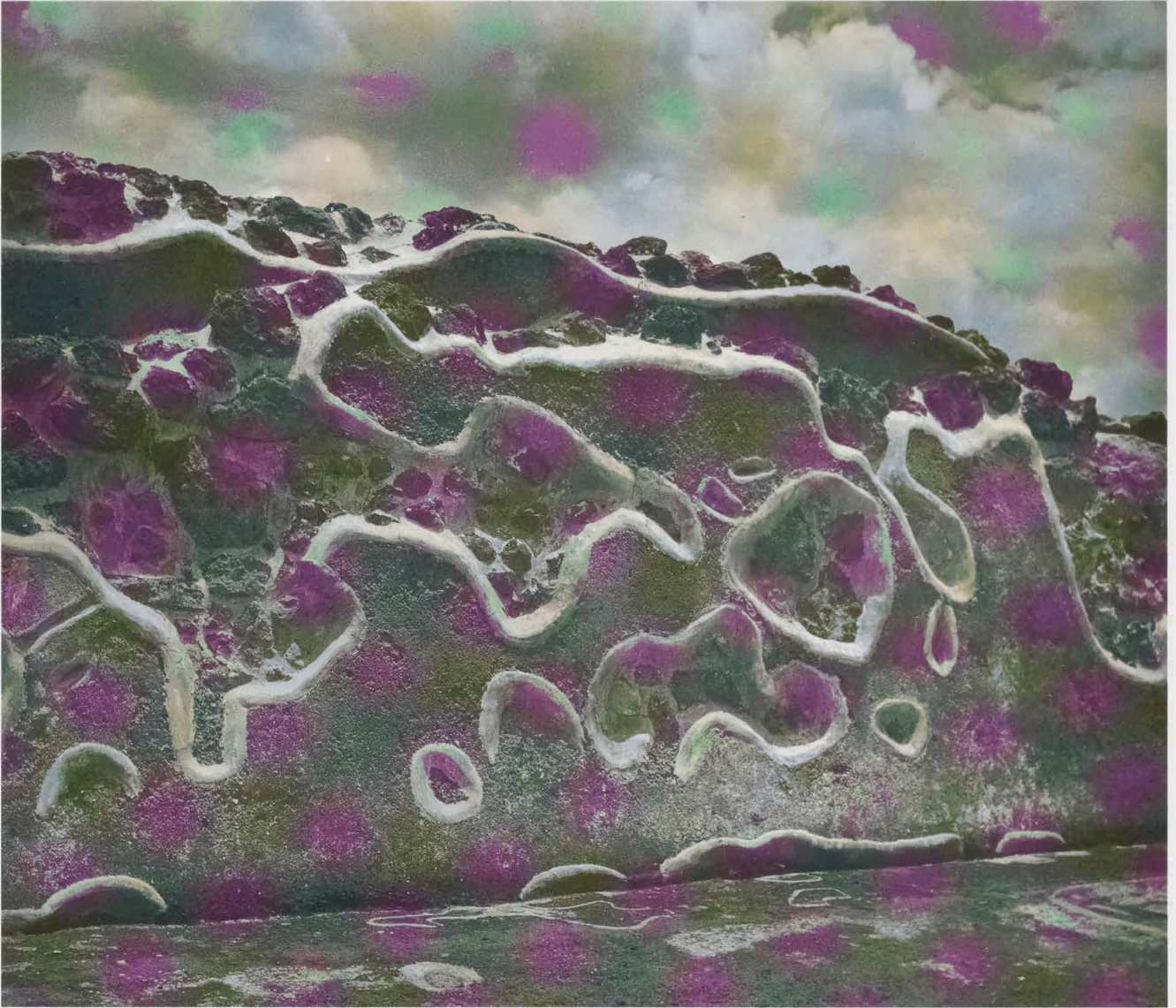


PLATE 17 *Paisaje fabricado*, 1951



PLATE 18 *Diego Rivera, 1945*



PLATE 19 *Frida Kahlo [with dog]*, ca. 1944



PLATE 20 *La visitación*, ca. 1934



PLATE 21 *Frida Kahlo*, ca. 1944



PLATE 22 *Marion Greenwood*, ca. 1935



PLATE 23 *Judith Martínez Ortega, 1940s*



PLATE 24 *Carlos Pellicer*, ca. 1950



PLATE 25 untitled [Appoloni● Castillo, diver, Acapulco], 1949



PLATE 26 *Rehiletes*, ca. 1975



PLATE 27 *El rapto*, ca. 1950

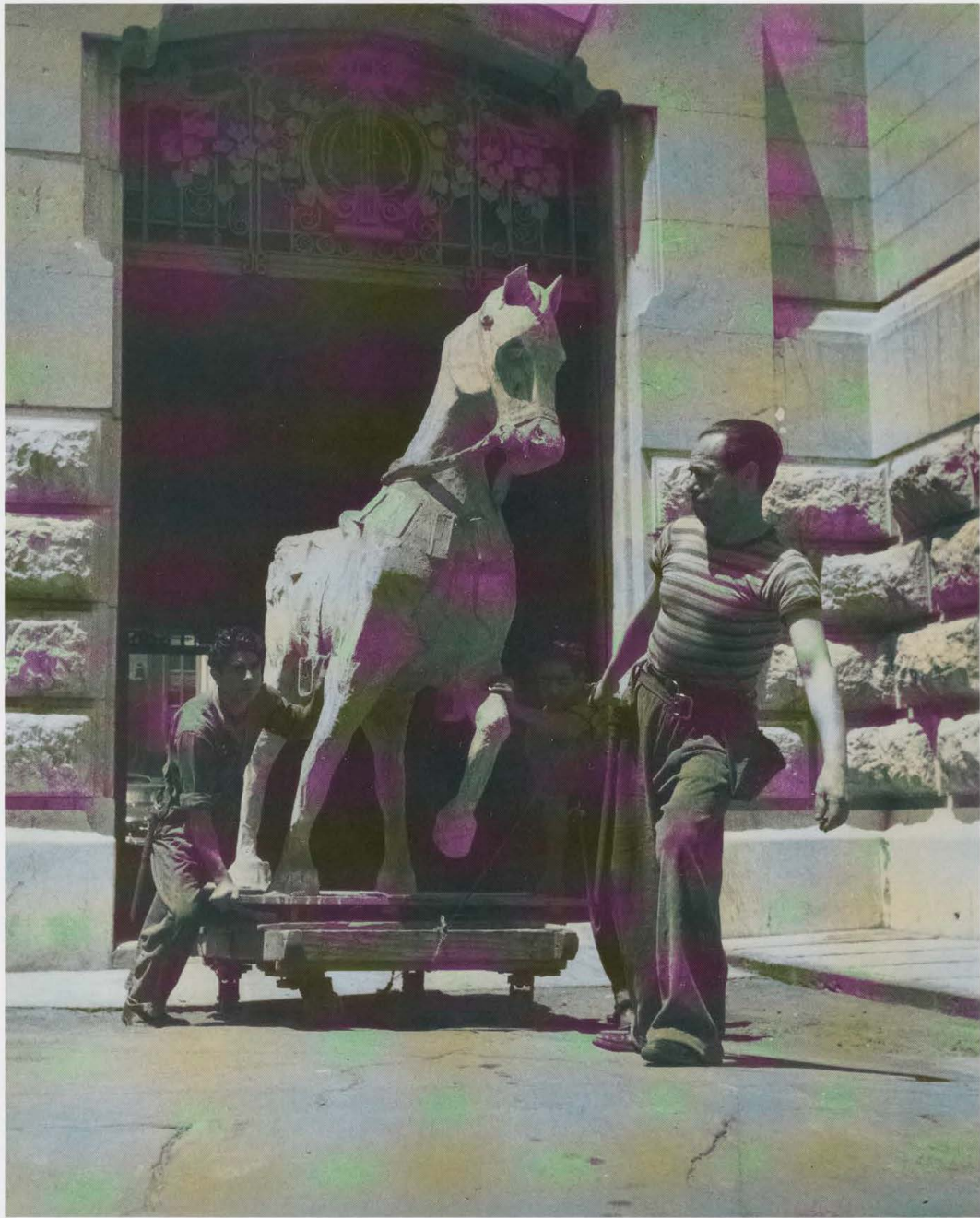


PLATE 28 *Saliendo de la ópera*, ca. 1947

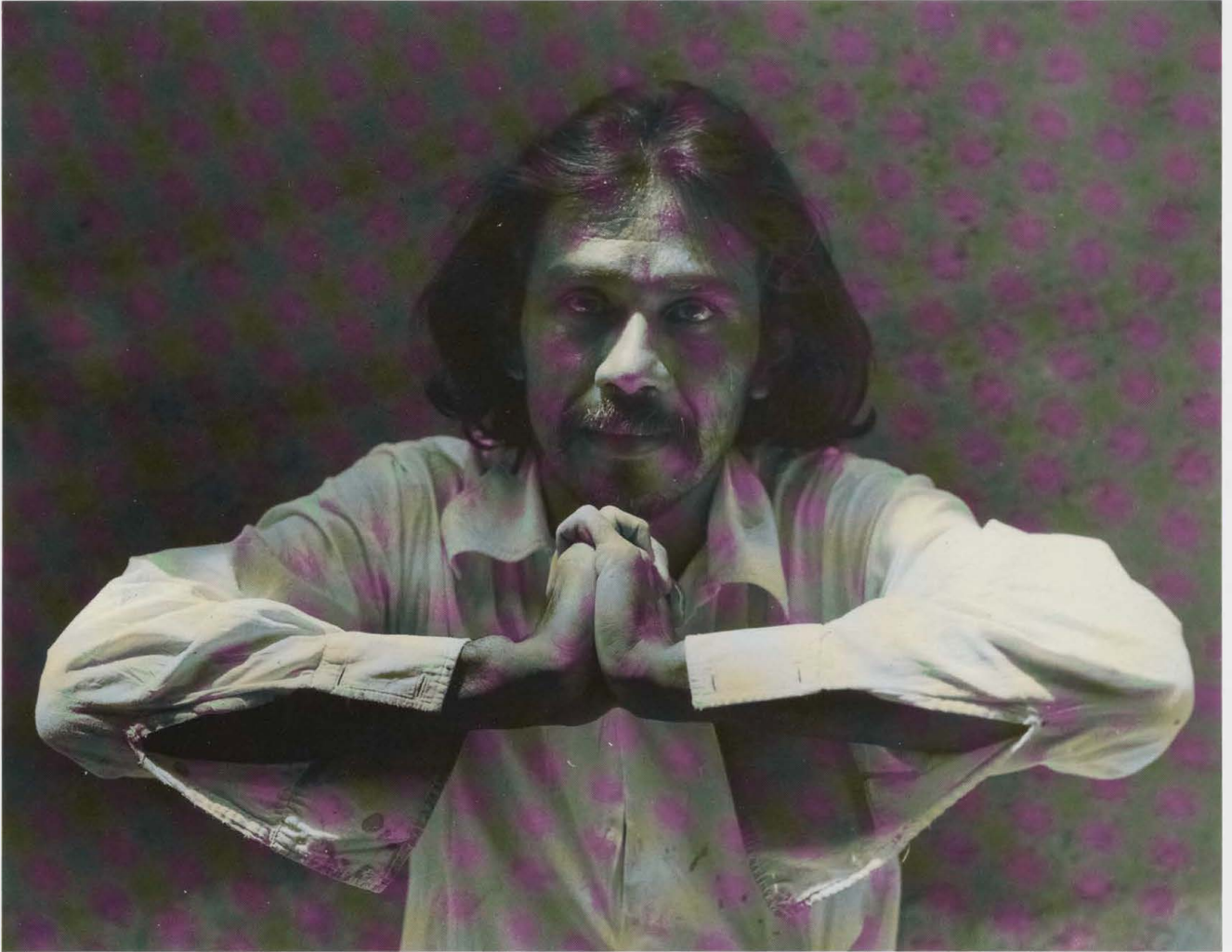


PLATE 29 *Francisco Toledo, 1981*



PLATE 30 *Voy más a mí*, ca. 1940



PLATE 31 *Henri Cartier-Bresson, 1963*



PLATE 32 untitled [gay rally, Mexico City], June 1982



PLATE 33 *Psiquiatras populares 1, 1930s*



PLATE 34 *Mar de temura*, ca. 1945



PLATE 35 *El duelo*, n.d.



PLATE 36 *Unos suben y otros bajan*, ca. 1940

Lola Alvarez Bravo Collection

The following checklist describes the one hundred works by Lola Alvarez Bravo at the Center for Creative Photography. All the photographs are gelatin silver prints. Plate numbers are indicated for photographs reproduced in this book. Alternate titles are cited in parentheses.

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| <i>A ver quién me oye (¿Me oirán?)</i> , 1939
Let's See Who Can Hear Me (Will Anyone Hear Me?)
23.5 x 17.0 cm
93:006:091 (Plate 1) | <i>Baño</i> , 1940s
Bath
24.5 x 19.2 cm
93:006:031 | <i>Dormido (La cruda; El reposo)</i> , ca. 1945
Asleep (The Hangover; Rest)
18.8 x 16.5 cm
93:006:052 |
| <i>El abandonado</i> , ca. 1940
The Abandoned One
22.3 x 14.7 cm
93:006:078 | <i>Baño [variant]</i> , 1940s
Bath
22.0 x 18.7 cm
93:006:032 (Plate 16) | <i>Dr. Atl</i> , ca. 1955
22.5 x 15.3 cm
93:006:021 |
| <i>Agarrándose</i> , 1940s
Grabbing on
19.0 x 24.0 cm
93:006:036 | <i>Carlos Fuentes</i> , 1962
23.4 x 17.5 cm
93:006:011 | <i>El duelo</i> , n.d.
Mourning
18.2 x 23.0 cm
93:006:092 (Plate 35) |
| <i>Los almiarcs (Labores)</i> , ca. 1940
The Haystacks (Farm Work)
18.4 x 23.0 cm
93:006:082 | <i>Carlos Pellicer</i> , ca. 1950
23.2 x 17.0 cm
93:006:002 (Plate 24) | <i>Dunas</i> , ca. 1950
Dunes
19.1 x 23.6 cm
93:006:067 |
| <i>Aprendiendo</i> , ca. 1965
Learning
21.8 x 17.9 cm
93:006:095 | <i>Ciego (Entre la luz y la sombra)</i> , ca. 1945
Blind One (Between Light and Shadow)
20.6 x 18.6 cm
93:006:030 | <i>En su propia cárcel</i> , ca. 1950
In Her Own Prison
18.4 x 21.2 cm
93:006:049 (Chronology text plate) |
| <i>Aseo</i> , 1940s
Clean-up
23.6 x 18.7 cm
93:006:048 | <i>Cuidakilos (El gordo)</i> , 1930s
Weightwatcher (The Fat Man)
21.5 x 17.3 cm
93:006:063 | <i>Entierro en Yalalag</i> , 1946
Burial in Yalalag
18.0 x 23.0 cm
93:006:096 (Plate 3) |
| <i>Autoretrato</i> , ca. 1950
Self-portrait
Printed by Jesús Sánchez Uribe, 1992
24.3 x 28.5 cm
93:006:022 (frontispiece) | <i>De generación en generación</i> , n.d.
From Generation to Generation
23.1 x 18.1 cm
93:006:080 | <i>La espina</i> , ca. 1950
The Thorn
19.0 x 23.6 cm
93:006:057 |
| | <i>Diego Rivera</i> , 1945
18.7 x 23.2 cm
93:006:013 (Plate 18) | <i>La feria</i> , ca. 1940
The Fair
23.5 x 15.0 cm
93:006:100 (Plate 9) |

- Francisco Toledo*, 1981
19.0 x 24.3 cm
93:006:008 (Plate 29)
- Frida Kahlo*, ca. 1944
25.2 x 20.4 cm
93:006:003 (Plate 21)
- Frida Kahlo [with dog]*, ca. 1944
23.7 x 18.6 cm
93:006:004 (Plate 19)
- Los gorriones*, ca. 1955
Street Urchins
18.8 x 21.1 cm
93:006:044
- La gruta*, 1940s
The Grotto
17.5 x 23.7 cm
93:006:024
- Henri Cartier-Bresson*, 1963
23.1 x 18.2 cm
93:006:018 (Plate 31)
- Hiedra (Ruina)*, ca. 1930
Ivy (Ruin)
24.1 x 20.0 cm
93:006:081
- Hombre rana*, 1949
Frog Man
23.5 x 19.0 cm
93:006:047
- Homenaje (Homenaje a Salvador Toscano)*, 1949
Homage (Homage to Salvador Toscano)
16.8 x 22.5 cm
93:006:074 (Plate 13)
- Indiferencia*, 1940s
Indifference
24.0 x 18.5 cm
93:006:089 (Plate 6)
- Jorge González Durán, Xavier Villaurrutia, Octavio Paz*, 1942
23.0 x 17.2 cm
93:006:019
- Judith Martínez Ortega*, 1940s
24.0 x 19.0 cm
93:006:005 (Plate 23)
- Las lavanderas*, ca. 1940
The Washerwomen
17.8 x 21.2 cm
93:006:037 (Plate 15)
- Leyendo el Informe*, 1940s
Reading the Informe
23.6 x 18.5 cm
93:006:058
- Luis Cardoza y Aragón*, ca. 1945
23.8 x 16.5 cm
93:006:017
- Lya Cardoza [Lya Kostakowsky de Cardoza y Aragón]*, ca. 1950
23.0 x 16.0 cm
93:006:007
- La Madre Matiana*, ca. 1935
17.5 x 22.0 cm
93:006:042 (Plate 7)
- Mandíbula de caballo*, 1960
Horse's Jawbone
22.6 x 17.6 cm
93:006:076
- Manuel Álvarez Bravo*, ca. 1934
15.4 x 20.2 cm
93:006:001 (text plate)
- Mar de ternura*, ca. 1945
Sea of Tenderness
23.0 x 16.5 cm
93:006:084 (Plate 34)
- Marion Greenwood*, ca. 1935
23.6 x 18.3 cm
93:006:014 (Plate 22)
- Mujeres de Papantla*, 1940s
Women of Papantla
23.0 x 17.5 cm
93:006:079 (Plate 2)
- El número 17*, ca. 1958
Number 17
23.0 x 16.0 cm
93:006:099
- Olimpo (Monte Parnaso; El Parnaso)*, ca. 1940
Olympus (Mount Parnassus; Parnassus)
17.9 x 23.8 cm
93:006:077
- Paisaje de vidrio*, ca. 1950
Glass Landscape
18.5 x 23.0 cm
93:006:073
- Paisaje fabricado*, 1951
Constructed Landscape
18.0 x 21.0 cm
93:006:075 (Plate 17)
- Paisaje impresionista*, ca. 1945
Impressionist Landscape
23.0 x 16.5 cm
93:006:086
- El panteoncito*, ca. 1945
The Little Cemetery
20.2 x 19.0 cm
93:006:064 (Plate 12)
- La patrona*, 1960s
The Patroness
23.0 x 18.5 cm
93:006:094 (Plate 5)
- Pespunteando en la brisa*, 1930s
Backstitching in the Breeze
20.0 x 20.0 cm
93:006:059
- Piedras nada más (Cuetzalan 2)*, ca. 1945
Nothing But Stones (Cuetzalan 2)
18.7 x 23.5 cm
93:006:056
- Pierre Végger*, ca. 1950
14.0 x 18.0 cm
93:006:015

- Por culpas ajenas*, ca. 1945
For the Fault of Others
24.0 x 19.5 cm
93:006:038 (Plate 8)
- Psiquiatras populares 1*, 1930s
Popular Psychiatrists 1
20.0 x 18.2 cm
93:006:040 (Plate 33)
- Psiquiatras populares 2*, 1930s
Popular Psychiatrists 2
25.5 x 17.0 cm
93:006:041
- ¿Qué pasó?*, 1940s
What Happened?
24.5 x 18.6 cm
93:006:029
- Raíz [playa de Chachalacas]*, 1940s
Root [Chachalacas Beach]
17.0 x 24.0 cm
93:006:066
- El rapto*, ca. 1950
Rapture
23.4 x 19.2 cm
93:006:028 (Plate 27)
- Rehiletes*, ca. 1975
Pinwheels
24.0 x 18.5 cm
93:006:050 (Plate 26)
- Rosaura Revueltas*, ca. 1950
23.3 x 18.5 cm
93:006:006
- El ruego*, 1946
The Plea
23.0 x 19.0 cm
93:006:083
- Rufino Tamayo*, ca. 1934
[attributed to Lola and/or Manuel Alvarez
Bravo]
19.0 x 22.0 cm
93:006:009 (text plate)
- Saliendo de la ópera*, ca. 1947
Leaving the Opera
23.0 x 18.5 cm
93:006:054 (Plate 28)
- Salvador Novo*, ca. 1945
23.5 x 18.6 cm
93:006:010
- San Isidro Labrador*, n.d.
16.7 x 21.0 cm
93:006:039 (Plate 4)
- Sexo vegetal*, ca. 1948
Vegetal Sex
18.8 x 23.1 cm
93:006:069
- Sin paisaje pero quietecito*, 1930s
No Landscape, But Still Calm
22.1 x 16.4 cm
93:006:098
- El sueño (Isabel Villaseñor en Tenacatita, Jalisco)*,
1941
The Dream (Isabel Villaseñor in Tenacatita,
Jalisco)
18.0 x 23.5 cm
93:006:020 (Plate 11)
- El sueño de los pobres 2*, 1949
The Dream of the Poor 2
17.1 x 23.6 cm
93:006:033 (Plate 10)
- Telas*, n.d.
Cloths
24.0 x 19.2 cm
93:006:071
- Tiburoneos*, 1949
Shark Fishermen
18.0 x 23.6 cm
93:006:045
- Tony Lujan*, 1940
19.0 x 11.8 cm
93:006:016 (text plate)
- Tiamoya*, ca. 1947
Stage Sets
22.0 x 16.5 cm
93:006:051
- Tríptico de los martirios 1*, 1949
Triptych of Martyrdoms 1
22.5 x 18.0 cm
93:006:025
- Tríptico de los martirios [variant]*, 1949
Triptych of Martyrdoms
21.9 x 17.8 cm
93:006:026
- Tríptico de los martirios 3*, 1949
Triptych of Martyrdoms 3
23.6 x 18.7 cm
93:006:027 (Plate 14)
- La Última Cena (Pocos los escogidos)*, ca. 1935
The Last Supper (Few Are Chosen)
16.7 x 23.0 cm
93:006:061
- Unos suben y otros bajan*, ca. 1940
Some Go Up, Others Go Down
23.5 x 17.6 cm
93:006:097 (Plate 36)
- untitled [Appolonio Castillo, diver,
Acapulco], 1949
23.3 x 18.5 cm
93:006:035 (Plate 25)
- untitled [arches of Iglesia de la Virgen
Milagrosa, Mexico City, by the architect
Félix Candela], 1954
23.7 x 19.5 cm
93:006:070
- untitled [gay rally, Mexico City], June 1982
23.5 x 17.5 cm
93:006:055 (Plate 32)
- untitled [girl embroidering huipil,
Tehuantepec], n.d.
19.0 x 22.5 cm
93:006:043
- untitled [hands of Lola Alvarez Bravo with
piece of obsidian], 1950s
25.2 x 20.1 cm
93:006:023 (cover)

untitled [nude pregnant woman — Julia
López], n.d.
17.4 x 15.2 cm
93:006:088

untitled [rocky beach], n.d.
23.0 x 18.2 cm
93:006:087

untitled [study for the photomontage *El sueño
de los pobres*], ca. 1935
17.4 x 23.3 cm
93:006:034

untitled [trapeze artist], 1930s
25.5 x 20.5 cm
93:006:060

untitled [tree], n.d.
24.0 x 18.0 cm
93:006:068

untitled [tree roots], n.d.
24.2 x 18.2 cm
93:006:072

untitled [woman and boy with market basket,
Cuetzalan], 1940s
23.7 x 19.0 cm
93:006:065

untitled [women with rebozos, man seated in
background], n.d.
18.5 x 24.0 cm
93:006:053

La visitación, ca. 1934
The Visit
22.9 x 17.2 cm
93:006:085 (Plate 20)

¡Oy más a mí, ca. 1940
I Count on Myself
18.5 x 20.0 cm
93:006:090 (Plate 30)

Xavier Villaurrutia, 1942
23.5 x 18.6 cm
93:006:012

Ya viene el agua, n.d.
Here Comes the Rain
18.2 x 23.5 cm
93:006:046

Yeso fresco, ca. 1940
Fresh Plaster
22.5 x 15.3 cm
93:006:093

8 a.m. (Morelia), ca. 1940
24.3 x 19.5 cm
93:006:062

Chronology

Born Dolores Martínez de Anda on April 3, 1907, in Lagos de Moreno, Jalisco, Mexico, to Gonzalo Martínez, an importer of art objects and furniture, and Sara de Anda.

Mother dies when Lola is three years old. Lola, her father, and her brother Miguel move to Mexico City, where her half-brother (also named Miguel) lives. Lola, her father, and her brother move to an apartment in a mansion on Calle del Factor.

Father dies during a trip to Veracruz in 1916. Lola goes to live with her half-brother and his wife on Calle de Guatemala (formerly Calle de Santa Teresa). She comes to know Manuel Alvarez Bravo who lives in the same building with his family.

Attends religious school, 1916–1922.

Marries Manuel Alvarez Bravo, at age eighteen, in 1925.

Lola and Manuel live in Oaxaca from 1925–1927. In 1926, Lola makes her first photographs with Manuel. Together they make frequent trips to Mexico City.

Return to Mexico City in 1927. Their son, Manuel, is born.

From 1927–1931, Lola assists Manuel in the first stage of his photographic career. They open an informal gallery at their house on Calle Xicotencatl, in Tacubaya, a suburb of Mexico City. They exhibit photographs, and other work by close friends, including José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Rufino Tamayo.

In 1931, Lola receives her first honorable mention in a photography contest sponsored by Cementos Tolteca.

Meets Paul Strand and travels with him in Mexico in 1933.

Organizes a film club with Julio Castellanos, Emilio Amero, and Manuel in 1934, under the auspices of the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios.

During the filming of Manuel's documentary *Tehuantepec*, in 1934, Lola travels with him and Henri Cartier-Bresson to Oaxaca.

In 1934, she separates from Manuel and rents a room in the house of her friend María Izquierdo. Soon thereafter, their son Manuel goes to live with his aunt, Manuel's sister, on Calle de Guatemala. Lola and Manuel are divorced fourteen years later in 1948.

Teaches drawing in elementary schools in 1934–1935, through a program of the Secretaría de Educación Pública, a job she got with the help of María Izquierdo.

Works for the Secretaría de Educación Pública, in the Department of Press and Publications, in 1935 and 1936. Works in their archives and contributes her own photographs and photomontages to the magazine *El Maestro Rural*.

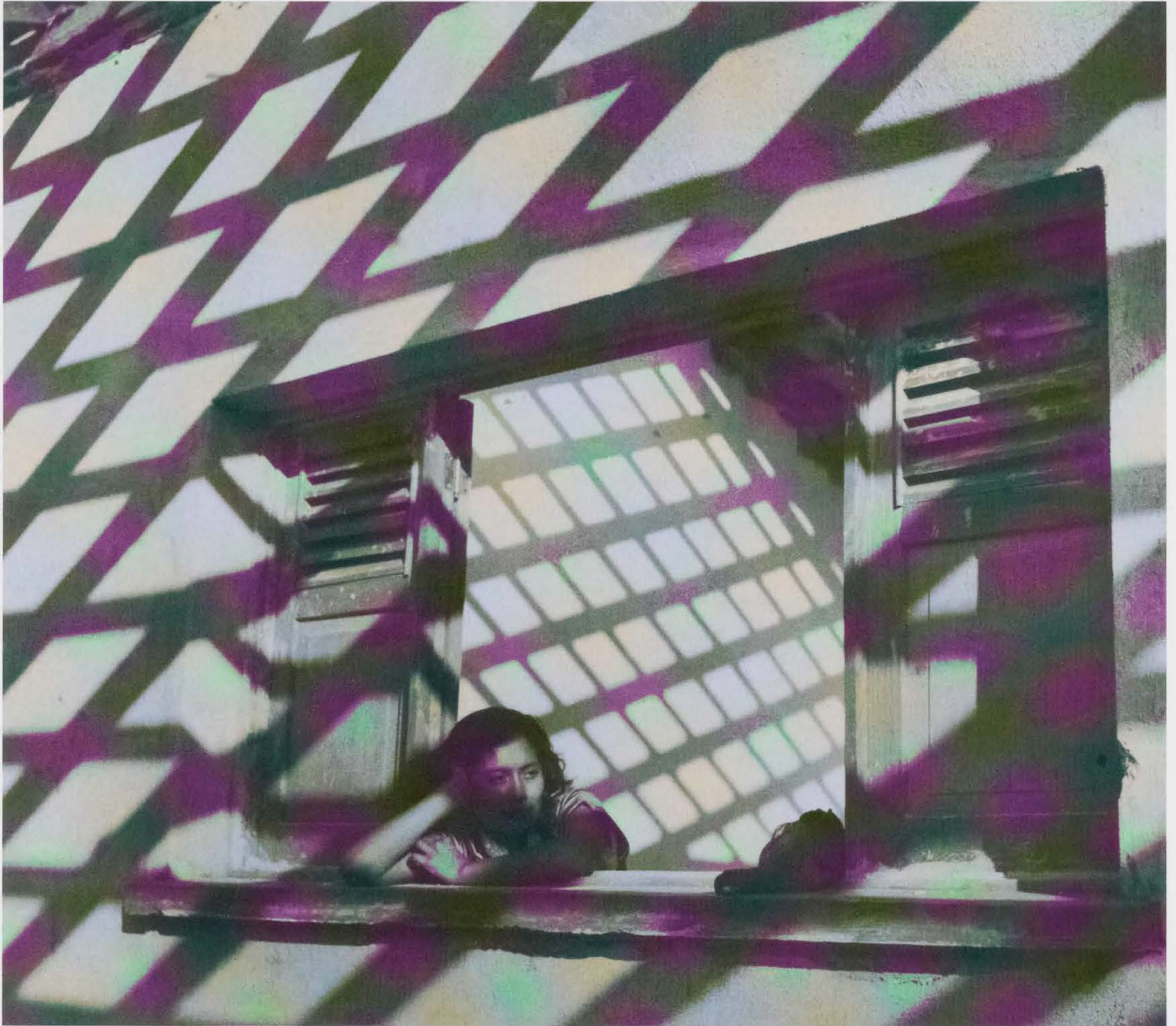
Meets Antonin Artaud, a frequent guest at María Izquierdo's house, in 1936.

Begins working in the Laboratorio de Arte del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, March 1937. Work includes photographing the choir stalls of the former church of San Agustín. Also works on commissions for books by Antonio Rodríguez, Luis Cardoza y Aragón, Frances Toor, and Justino Fernández, among others.

Leaves the home of Izquierdo by 1939, finally moving downtown to Avenida Juárez 135, where she lives until 1991.

Begins photographing for architects assigned to the Secretaría de Salubridad y Asistencia, documenting rural housing.

In 1940, goes on a state sponsored tour of the drought-stricken region of La Laguna, and documents starvation and government assistance programs.



Lola Alvarez Bravo: *En su propia cárcel*, ca. 1950; In Her Own Prison; Center for Creative Photography

She is named chief of the photography department of the Dirección de Educación Extraescolar y Estética in 1941. She photographs for the organization's magazine. As part of the "cultural brigade," she travels all over Mexico to cover official ceremonies.

In the 1940s, she is hired by various magazines including *Vea, Voz, Hoy, Rotofoto, Futuro, Espacios*, and others, as a staff photographer.

In 1943, her work is included in *Mexican Art Today*, an exhibition organized by Henry Clifford for the Philadelphia Museum of Art.

Organizes an exhibition of painters from the state of Jalisco, *Pintores jaliscienses*, in 1944. Among those included were Doctor Atl, María Izquierdo, José Clemente Orozco, Juan Soriano, and Isabel Villaseñor. Edits a small catalog for the exhibition with a prologue by Jorge González Durán. Concurrently, an exhibit of twenty-eight of Lola's photographs is held at the same museum, the Palacio de Bellas Artes, in Mexico City.

As business partners, Lola and Manuel open a studio, the Taller de Fotografía Alvarez Bravo, in 1945. Lola's participation in this venture is brief.

In 1945, travels to New York with Ricardo Martínez, Octavio Paz, and Juan Soriano to see an exhibition of young Mexican artists. They are invited by Inés Amor, Mexico's major art dealer. Also visits Philadelphia at the invitation of Henry Clifford. Back in Mexico City, she begins the Taller Libre de Fotografía, an evening course at the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas.

In 1946, Carlos Chávez asks Lola to go to rural Oaxaca to gather information on traditional dance for the Ballet Nacional, then run by American dancer Ana Sokolov. Also spends six months taking photographs for the memoirs of President Manuel Avila Camacho. At the same time, she free-lances for various government agencies, working on such projects as a literacy campaign for the Secretaría de Educación Pública.

The Dirección de Educación Extraescolar y Estética changes its name to Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura in 1946. Lola works for a series of directors there, from Carlos Chávez through Miguel Bueno. She retires in 1971.

Throughout the late forties and fifties, Lola is an important figure in promoting and exhibiting Mexican art, organizing exhibitions for the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes.

In 1950, she converts a garage in the Colonia Juárez into a gallery and outdoor sculpture garden. The Galería de Arte Contemporáneo formally opens in October of 1951; she often collaborates with her former students in mounting exhibitions. Begins operating a photography studio at this location. In conjunction with the activities of this gallery, Lola organizes exhibitions for other cities, including Oaxaca and Zacatecas.

With Frida Kahlo, writes a screenplay for a surrealist film. Production begins, with the participation of Diego Rivera, but the project is never finished.

Organizes Frida Kahlo's first solo exhibition in Mexico at her gallery in 1953.

Works as art professor in the Departamento de Artes Plásticas of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes from 1955 to 1959. Her photograph, *Burial in Yalalag*, is included in the landmark photography exhibition *The Family of Man* at The Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1955.

Travels to Europe with her friends Fernando and María de la Paz Canales, 1959. They have a car accident in Rome.

In 1961, Lola suffers a heart attack.

Regaining her strength, she turns to Benito Coquet, now director of the Instituto Mexicano de Seguridad Social, who gives her work.

In recognition of her meritorious service, Lola is presented with the José Clemente Orozco Commemorative Plaque by the state of Jalisco in 1964. That same year, 2,544 of her negatives of art reproductions are acquired by the Presidency of the Republic. In 1976 they are transferred to the Departamento de Artes Plásticas of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes.

From 1965 to 1970, coordinates the fashion section of the newspaper *Novedades* with Ana Benítez.

In September and October 1965, an exhibition of Lola's portraits, entitled *Galería de mexicanos: 100 fotos de Lola Alvarez Bravo*, is held at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City.

Illustrates a national report for Programa Federal de Construcción de Escuelas, presented in Geneva, 1966.

In 1968, directs the movie *Diego Rivera en la Capilla de Chapingo*, produced by Fernando Canales.

First retrospective exhibition of her work at the Alianza Francesa de Polanco, Mexico City, in 1979. Works selected by Lola and Olivier Debroise.

In 1980, the Fondo de Cultura Económica edits a book of her portraits of figures from the Mexican intellectual community: *Escritores y artistas de México: fotografías de Lola Alvarez Bravo*.

Exhibits at the Osuna Gallery in Washington, D.C., 1981.

In 1982, Editorial Penélope publishes the first major volume dedicated to Lola's photography: *Lola Alvarez Bravo: Recuento fotográfico*. The book includes interviews with Lola by José Joaquín Blanco, Luis Zapata, and Manuel Fernández Perera, and 120 reproductions.

Receives Distinguished Citizen medal from the Department of Fine Arts of the state of Jalisco, in 1983.

In 1984, the exhibition *De las humildes cosas* opens at the Centro Cultural Tijuana.

Gives photography workshops in 1984 and 1985 at the Centro Universitario de Estudios Cinematográficos, Mexico City. In 1985, a space for photography exhibitions is dedicated in her name at the Degollado Theater in Guadalajara.

With numerous health problems, stops photographing in 1986.

In 1989 an exhibition of her work, *Reencuentros*, is held at the Museo Estudio Diego Rivera, Mexico City.

In 1991, moves out of the apartment where she had lived since 1939, to a building where her son Manuel lives, in the Colonia Condesa.

That same year, the exhibition *Lola Alvarez Bravo: The Frida Kahlo Photographs* is organized by the Society of Friends of the Mexican Culture, Dallas, Texas. It travels to Dallas, Texas, Washington, D.C., and Albuquerque, New Mexico. A similar exhibition *Frida y su mundo: Fotografías de Lola Alvarez Bravo*, opens at the Galería Juan Martín, Mexico City.

A major retrospective, *Lola Alvarez Bravo: fotografías selectas 1934-1985*, is organized by the Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City, in 1992.

On July 31, 1993, Lola Alvarez Bravo dies at home at the age of 86.

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Olivier Debroyse has lived in Mexico since 1970. He is an art critic and historian, and is the director of Curare: Espacio Crítico para las Artes. His most recent book, *Fuga mexicana*, is an overview of the history of photography in Mexico. He is also the author of *Figuras en el trópico: Plástica mexicana 1920–1940* and two novels.

James Oles lives in Mexico City, where he works as an independent critic and curator. He is the author of *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1914–1947*, and curator of the traveling exhibition of the same name, organized by the Yale University Art Gallery.

OTHER TITLES OF INTEREST

Edward Weston: Photographs from the Collection of the Center for Creative Photography by Amy Conger is the largest catalog ever published of a photographer's work. The 1826 images are numerous works from his famous Mexican period, accompanied by a biography, a bibliography, list of exhibitions, descriptions of Weston's negative numbering system, and other invaluable appendices.
\$100

The Letters from Tina Modotti to Edward Weston, correspondence spanning the years 1922 to 1931 and accompanied by texts and chronologies by Amy Stark [Rule] includes information about the period of time they both spent in Mexico.
\$15

Contemporary Photography in Mexico: Nine Photographers by Terence Pitts and Rene Verdugo is an exhibition catalog that includes the work of Manuel Alvarez Bravo along with eight other important contemporary Mexican photographers.
\$3.50

Center for Creative Photography
The University of Arizona
Tucson, Arizona 85721

Mis fotos, mis arte. Throughout her photographic career as a photojournalist, portraitist, and political photographer, Lola Alvarez Bravo kept a body of cherished images as her own art. *In Her Own Light* is devoted to her work as an artist and includes those photographs of Mexico, her true subject, that place her among the renowned photographic interpreters of that country in the modern period: Edward Weston, Paul Strand, Tina Modotti, and Manuel Alvarez Bravo.

In Her Own Light is the first overview of Lola Alvarez Bravo's work published outside Mexico. Thirty-six of her photographs from the Center's collection are presented in conjunction with a bilingual account of the experience and accomplishments of Lola Alvarez Bravo by art historian and Lola confidante Olivier Debrouse. His elucidating and intimate essay, written in Spanish, is translated by James Oles. Also included are a chronology, selected bibliography, and a complete listing of the prints in the Lola Alvarez Bravo Collection at the Center for Creative Photography.

36 duotones

88 pages

English/Spanish