



INTRODUCTION TO CARLOS MÉRIDA'S “THE TRUE MEANING OF THE WORK OF SATURNINO HERRÁN”

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When the Guatemalan artist Carlos Mérida (1891–1984) arrived in Mexico City during December of 1919, he possessed knowledge of the European avant-garde and contemporary Mayan *artesanía* that enabled him to bring a cosmopolitan vantage point to one of the most pressing questions in postrevolutionary Mexico: how should young artists draw on autochthonous culture to renew a nationalist art? Mérida issued a strongly worded answer to this question six months later in “The True Meaning of the Work of Saturnino Herrán: The False Critics,” the Document translated in this issue of *ARTMargins*.^{*} In his highly polemical text, Mérida accused Mexican critics of misinterpreting the paintings of Saturnino Herrán (1887–1918). Herrán, who died prematurely, had been celebrated at the time of his death in 1918 by poet-critics, such as the beloved Ramón López Velarde, as a painter of Mexican themes. The artist’s practice of depicting peasants, *Tehuanas*—women of the Isthmus region of Oaxaca in Southeastern Mexico—and scenes of pre-Columbian gods and contemporary folk rituals were not what made his work worthy of critical praise, Mérida contended. Herrán should not be admired, as critics claimed, as “the most Mexican of painters and the greatest painter of

* Carlos Mérida, “La verdadera significación de la obra de Saturnino Herrán: Los falsos críticos,” *El Universal Ilustrado*, July 29, 1920, 14 and 26. Quotes from this manifesto are derived from the translation in the Document.

Mexico.¹ Instead, Mérida explained, it was Herrán's skill as a drafts-person that merited critical admiration. At face value, Mérida was deriding Herrán's paintings with the false praise that they were well-drawn, that they were "drawings with color"—an insult to any painter.² But the Guatemalan interloper was also, in fact, setting his sights on a much larger and more consequential target than the draftsman-like quality of Herrán's paintings. Mérida was arguing that the artist's reputation as the country's greatest Mexican artist was merely a symptom of a far more serious problem: Mexican critics' lack of objective judgment—that is, their failure to establish consistent, transparent criteria for determining what nationalist painting should be.

In "The True Meaning of the Work of Saturnino Herrán," Mérida proposes new criteria that would correct the critic's role and set Mexican artists on a path to developing a stronger nationalist painting. First, he argues, critics and artists must abandon their affection for literary themes. The then-current practice of representing Mexican identity through realist paintings in which an artist would feature an existing set of motifs was dangerous, he explains, because it would encourage local audiences to embrace long-standing picturesque types. As Mérida laments, "It is believed that artists make nationalist works when they paint either a *charro*, a *rebozo*, or a *china poblana* or a more or less starched *Tehuana*, or even a servile copy of the Aztec Calendar or Sacrificial Stone."³ Most readers in Mexico City would have understood that he was referring to a set of imagery that had lost its authority because it had been so long produced and displayed in two distinct and yet equally visible realms of image consumption: at the annual exhibitions at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, where realist paintings of

1 Carlos Mérida cites this phrase on p. 14 of his text, which he has borrowed from a headline by one of the many texts written in honor of Herrán following his early death. The article Mérida was referring to is the following: Federico E. Mariscal, "Saturnino Herrán: El más mexicano de los pintores y el más pintor de los mexicanos," *El Pueblo*, December 29, 1918. The Spanish title literally translates as "the most Mexican of painters and the most painter of Mexicans."

2 Mérida, 26.

3 *Ibid.* Images of *charros* (cowboys from the central states), *rebozos* (shawls of indigenous origin), *chinas poblanas* (women wearing a traditional mode of dress common in central Mexico until the mid-nineteenth-century), and *Tehuanas* (women from the Istmo region of Oaxaca) were all produced onstage and in tourist postcards during the period. His reference to "the Aztec Calendar" and the "Sacrificial Stone" refers to Aztec sculptures recently exhumed.

such Mexican motifs lined the gallery walls, and in postcards and photographs that produced romantic images of traditional Mexico for foreign tourists.

Disdain for such “literary” themes of picturesque nationalist types was a complaint voiced by many critics and artists of Mérida’s generation in Mexico, Peru, and even Argentina, who, by the early 1920s, were clamoring for artists to take formal approaches to incorporating autochthonous culture into their artworks. Most famously, the Peruvian critic, writer, and leftist organizer José Carlos Mariátegui (1894–1930) incorporated this stance into his influential text “Literature on Trial,” wherein he argued that realist modes of representing indigenous people must be abandoned because they repeated colonial impulses to record and collect images of exotic peoples created by *costumbrismo*, the eighteenth-century Spanish practice of capturing the charm of foreign peoples by lavishing attention on the details of their dress.⁴ Although his politics differed from the socialist Peruvian’s, the Argentinean critic Alberto Prebisch (1899–1970) similarly lamented the ongoing presence of stereotypically “Argentine” views of the *pampas* at the annual Salons in Buenos Aires. In his reviews for the avant-garde magazine *Martín Fierro* in Buenos Aires during the mid-1920s, Prebisch urged artists to turn instead to the rhythms and shapes of the city in search of sources for an Argentine painting whose nationalism would be expressed through its forms rather than through iconographic motifs.⁵ All these cases indicate a growing cohort of what we could call modernist critics who were simultaneously directing their complaints about the “literary” toward both an older generation of poet-critics and a young generation of artists, whom they sought to convince that art does not need to contain such obvious motifs of “the Mexican” or “the Argentinean” to be of national interest.

Mérida’s polemic begins by flatly rejecting realist painting and sculpture, as well as the critics who praise it. If critics were to assess art according to its forms and not its thematic content, he explains, their judgment would be less clouded by personal prejudice—that is, by their own memory or emotional associations. Mérida argues that rather

4 José Carlos Mariátegui, “Literature on Trial,” in *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, trans. Marjory Urquidí (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 182–287.

5 Alberto Prebisch, “El XIV Salón Nacional de Bellas Artes,” *Martín Fierro* 2, nos. 10–11 (September–October 1924): 72; “Salón Nacional de Bellas Artes de 1926,” *Martín Fierro* 3, no. 24 (October 5, 1926): 272–73. Both citations are from the facsimile edition.

than attending to artworks' "symbols and ideologies," critics should attend to "the essential character of a picture, its true plastic value, its material quality, the harmony of its tones, its drawing, its tendency, etc." "It is painting or sculpture that is at stake, not literature," Mérida decisively declares.⁶ In making such charges, he also suggests that the consequences of approaching indigenous themes as merely "literary" sources have been especially grave in Mexico, because the paintings produced through such an approach encourage Mexicans to develop a picturesque, touristic sense of their own culture.

When Mérida struggles with the difficult question of how modern artists *should* deal with indigenous cultures, he is less decisive. It is clear, though, that a key goal of improving how artists represent indigenous cultures in Mexico or Guatemala is finding a means for artists like himself to identify less superficial aspects of the local people and their arts than the charming and easily consumable imagery exhibited in a painting by Herrán. Mérida declares that, "To make nationalist art, we must fuse the essential part of our autochthonous art with our current countenance and our current feeling, but not in an external, that is to say theatrical, form but instead in its essential, spiritual form." His emphasis on spirit and on an internal aspect of indigenous art suggests that he, like many of his peers, believed that the formal beauty of *artesanía* was evidence of the spiritual and emotional substance of its makers: that is, not only that an Indian craftsman could possess an interior life that bore commonalities with that of modern man, but that a traditional artisan could serve as an intermediary figure through which the modern avant-garde artist could identify deeper veins of emotion and spirit within himself. Even though this was a primitivist trope, it acquired new, politicized meanings in Mexico and Peru during the 1920s, where critics like Mérida, Mariátegui, and others experienced uneasy and inconsistent relationships with the Indian and mestizo people they painted, the indigenous crafts and costumes they depicted, and even how their own ethnic indigeneity was implicated in their capacity to identify with these subjects. (Mérida's family was ethnically part Maya, a fact that was noted in the press during the 1920s.⁷) Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that the power relationship

6 Mérida, 14.

7 Anita Brenner, "An Artist from the Maya Country," *International Studio* (April 1926): 85–87; Máximo Bretal, "Mérida, pintor de Guatemala," *El Universal Ilustrado*, November 12, 1925, 32–33.

always favored the cosmopolitan artist. Indeed, in this text, Mérida is cautious to relegate “indigenous art” to playing the role of “nothing more than guidance.”

By bringing to light a different take on debates about questions of art and nationalism, Mérida’s article brings into view unacknowledged facts about postrevolutionary Mexican art that suggest that questions of identity were being considered with far more complexity than has been acknowledged. It proves that postrevolutionary Mexican art was not invented from scratch by returning heroes from Europe or from the war at home, such as Diego Rivera (1886–1957), José Clemente Orozco (1883–1949), and David Alfaró Siqueiros (1896–1974). It raises questions central to Mexican art at the time—whether this art should express its cultural identity through formal or thematic means, and to what degree it should depend on European trends—which were being examined by cosmopolitan artists and critics within a setting that was transnational. It also reveals that the question of what Mexican art should look like was being debated by a network of critics and artists who traveled extensively across Europe and Latin America. Furthermore, it indicates that these debates were taking place in the cosmopolitan milieu of a Mexico City populated by immigrants and connected to other Latin American centers through the press and the post.

Even Mérida’s biography offers much to complicate narratives of travel, nationalism, and the development of art and criticism in 1920s Mexico and Latin America. Mérida’s text bears many signs of having been conceived by a writer who—having lived in Paris and traveled to New York in the decade leading up to 1920, and later resided in Guatemala and Mexico—beheld the scene in Mexico City with a vision informed by his mobility. Mérida had become fluent in European avant-garde methods while living in Paris between 1909 and 1914, where, among other experiences, he may have encountered European artists representing “exotic” cultures, such as the paintings of Moroccan women that Henri Matisse exhibited at the Galerie Bernheim-Jeune in 1913.⁸ He may have also witnessed various approaches to the revival and embrace of local folk cultures, such as those on view at the Salon d’Automne of 1913, where a selection of Russian folk art was exhibited. (Although no historical record exists of his attending either

8 Matisse displayed thirteen of his Moroccan women at that Parisian gallery in spring 1913.

of these exhibitions, they evince the visibility of such themes and issues in Paris generally during Mérida's stay.)

Mérida arrived in Mexico City armed with contacts with prominent Mexican artists and critics whom he had met in Europe and New York. He had encountered many Mexicans while living in Paris—including Roberto Montenegro (1885–1968), Rivera, and Adolfo Best Maugard (1892–1964)—and had befriended José Juan Tablada (1871–1945) while passing through New York in 1917. (Both Tablada and Montenegro were early proponents of Mexican folk art.) These contacts helped him find work writing for magazines and newspapers, which was a prime source of income for Mérida during the early 1920s, when he worked as an art critic for two prominent Mexico City–based magazines: *El Universal Ilustrado* and *Revista de Revistas*. The former title, a large-format illustrated magazine comparable to *Caras y Caretas* in Argentina, throughout the early- to mid-1920s was a lively source of information on new art and culture that addressed a growing middle class eager to feel connected to the rest of Latin America and the world. That a text as antagonistic as Mérida's "The True Meaning of the Work of Saturnino Herrán" appeared in *El Universal Ilustrado* also says a great deal about the support for young oppositional voices that existed in Mexico during the early 1920s. *El Universal Ilustrado* employed Mérida and many other young avant-garde artists to write for and edit the magazine. From June to December of 1920, he wrote once or twice a month for the magazine and for its affiliated newspaper, *El Universal*, about exhibitions in Mexico City and themes related to modern art and Mexican culture.⁹

Although Mérida published no other polemical texts during this period, in his art reviews for *El Universal Ilustrado* he trained a critical

9 Volume 2 of Xavier Moysén's *La crítica de arte en México: 1896–1921* (2 vols.) (Mexico City: UNAM–IIE, 1999) contains much of the criticism Mérida produced between 1920 and 1921, although not all of it. Various texts are available in the Document database of the International Center for the Arts of the Americas, at <http://icaadocs.mfah.org/icaadocs/>, accessed July 10, 2016. For the most comprehensive record of his writings about art and dance from 1920 to 1981, see "Hemerografía," in *Homenaje nacional a Carlos Mérida (1891–1984)* (Monterrey: Museo de Monterrey–INBA, 1992), 271–73. This monograph also contains the most current and comprehensive accounts of all aspects of Mérida's work and writings. Collections of Mérida's later writings on muralism and dance are collected in, respectively, *Escritos de Carlos Mérida sobre arte: El muralismo*, ed. Xavier Guzmán, Alicia Sánchez Mejorada de Gil, Leticia Torres Carmona, and Amando Torres Michúa (Mexico City: INBA–CENIDIAP, 1987); and *Escritos de Carlos Mérida sobre arte: La danza*, ed. Cristina Mendoza (Mexico City: INBA–CENIDIAP, 1990).

eye on a milieu that was clearly as aware of cosmopolitan trends as it was of its own need to embrace local artists and cultures. He covered exhibitions of the drawings of the Mexican artist Carlos Orozco Romero (1896–1984) and the Salvadoran caricaturist Toño Salazar (1897–1986), as well as the annual exhibition of students’ work at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes, the most prominent venue for displays of new art.¹⁰ Mérida’s articles on modern art in the magazine—including essays on Robert Delaunay’s “simultaneísmo” and on Futurism, topics familiar to an admittedly limited circle, but referencing works that could be seen in black-and-white reproductions in the magazine—display a perspective on the European avant-garde that is simultaneously receptive and thoughtfully critical.¹¹ In his writing on “simultaneísmo,” Mérida deems Delaunay’s theories of color useful, but, in the article on Futurism he expresses extreme skepticism regarding the movement’s relevance for Latin American artists.¹²

Beyond a short statement for a pamphlet, Mérida did not write about his own art during this period.¹³ “The True Meaning of the Work of Saturnino Herrán” should, however, be interpreted as an early effort to critically frame his own artistic practice. When Mérida moved to Mexico City, he brought with him a trove of paintings he had made while traveling through the mountains of Guatemala to paint indigenous women after he had left Paris, works he no doubt hoped would help him secure visibility as an artist in Mexico and prove him an experienced painter of indigenous themes. Just two months after he had published his polemic, Mérida achieved his goal, by being invited to exhibit his work at the galleries of the Escuela Nacional, where he had

10 Mérida, “Siluetas de Dibujantes Mexicanos [Carlos Orozco],” *El Universal Ilustrado*, May 26, 1920; Mérida, “Siluetas de Caricaturistas de América: Toño Salazar,” *El Universal Ilustrado*, September 3, 1920; Mérida, “Las decoraciones florales de las canoas de Xochimilco,” *El Universal Ilustrado*, February 2, 1922.

11 Futurism possesses a long history of reception in Mexico and Latin America, dating from the great poet Rubén Darío’s translation of Marinetti’s 1909 manifesto, which appeared with commentary in *La Nación* (Buenos Aires) on April 5, 1909. See *International Yearbook of Futurism Studies: Futurism in Latin America*, ed. Mariana Aguirre, Rosa Sarabia, Renée M. Silverman, and Ricardo Vasconcelos (Cumberland, RI: Walter de Gruyter, Inc., 2017).

12 Mérida, “La Escuela pictórica del día: El simultaneísmo de Delaunay,” *El Universal Ilustrado*, June 17, 1920; Mérida, “Cuestiones de arte moderno: Algosobre el futurism,” *El Universal Ilustrado*, June 1920.

13 Mérida wrote a brief statement for the pamphlet accompanying *Exposición Carlos Mérida* (Mexico City: Salon de Exposiciones de La Academia Nacional de Bellas Artes, August 25–September 10, 1920).

been hired by the school's director to help devise programs for presenting modern art in the school's galleries.¹⁴ In August 1920, the school's newly renovated modern galleries hosted a selection of some forty paintings and watercolors that Mérida had made in Guatemala in 1919 and on the outskirts of Mexico City during the spring and summer of 1920.

It was no coincidence that Mérida's antagonistic essay appeared just two months before his exhibition opened. Although Mérida's paintings of indigenous women were by no means complete abstractions, they approached the motif of indigenous culture and people in a manner theretofore unseen in Mexico City. Presenting aggressively flat, synthetic renderings of Mayan women, these paintings could not have been more different from Herrán's. Instead of emphasizing the beauty of his female models, as Herrán did, Mérida almost ignored the women completely. By rendering their heads and bodies as highly synthesized geometric forms, he instead accentuated the formal beauty of the women's indigenous textiles by depicting them in extreme detail. Furthermore, the compositions and palettes of the paintings themselves appeared to be inspired by the patterns and colors of the textiles worn by the models.

Because Mérida's unusual paintings were widely reproduced in the Mexican press during the summer and fall of 1920, including features in both *El Universal* and *El Universal Ilustrado*, they would have been visible even to Mexicans who did not attend his exhibition at the Escuela Nacional. It therefore must have been a deliberate strategy for Mérida to illustrate "The True Meaning of the Work of Saturnino Herrán" with prominently placed reproductions of two of Herrán's paintings: a 1914 drawing of a mestiza draped in a silk *rebozo* from central Mexico, and a 1915 painting of the artist's wife wearing the dress of *Tehuanas*. Herrán's paintings unquestionably present beautiful women for an erotic gaze.¹⁵ Both models are shown wearing traditional costumes that enhance the desirability of their bodies and faces. Just as

14 The Escuela's new director, Alfredo Ramos Martínez, had asked Mérida to assist him in devising a new program for the school's galleries that would expose students to the latest trends in modern art. Regarding these exhibitions, see boxes 2 and 4 at the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes Archive, Facultad de Arquitectura/UNAM, Mexico City.

15 My interpretation is based on Adriana Zavala's excellent reading of the sexuality of Herrán's paintings in *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition: Women, Gender, and Representation in Mexican Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 146–52.



Carlos Mérida. *La pincetas de Ixtanquiú*, 1919. Oil on canvas, 20¹/₂ × 23¹³/₁₆ in. (52 × 60.5 cm). Private collection. Image courtesy of the author.

the *rebozo* is not meant to be admired as an object that can be examined for its inherent beauty, but rather as an adornment accentuating the beauty of its wearer, the dramatic head piece of the *Tehuana*'s costume accentuates the movement or potential movement of the body of its wearer. In sharp contrast, Mérida renders his women as inert figures completely devoid of any sign of living flesh, painting them instead as two-dimensional mannequins whose task is to display the formal beauty of the textiles they wear.

Montenegro, Tablada, and the director of *El Universal Ilustrado*, Carlos Noriega Hope (1896–1934), all praised the works in Mérida's inaugural exhibition for their display of the artist's love for "American" culture.¹⁶ Although Mérida was admired for focusing on cultures that had been great ancient civilizations—namely the

16 Francisco Zamora [Jerónimo Coignard], José Juan Tablada, Roberto Montenegro, Manuel Horta, and Carlos Noriega Hope [Silvestre Bonnard], "Jucios de artistas e intelectuales mexicanos sobre la obra de Carlos Mérida," *El Universal*, August 28, 1920, 23.



LA VERDADERA SIGNIFICACION DE LA OBRA DE SATURNINO HERRAN LOS FALSOS CRITICOS

Por Carlos MERIDA

SE ha pretendido darle a la obra de Saturnino Herrán un carácter nacionalista lo que es absolutamente falso si estudiamos la característica de este pintor; son los literatos los que han equivocado el verdadero sentido de la labor de Herrán; nada más peligroso para los pintores y escultores que la crítica de los literatos; generalmente ellos escriben bajo la personal impresión de algo que les sugiere un ínfimo elemento del cuadro o estatua y se dan a la tarea de ver esto y lo otro y lo de más allá en una forma, naturalmente, literaria y atribuyendo al pintor símbolos e ideologías que estuvieron bastante lejos de su imaginación, sin tener en cuenta, casi nunca, el carácter esencial del cuadro, su verdadero valor plástico, su calidad de materia, su armonía de tonos, su dibujo, su tendencia, etc., cualidades todas que hay que tener muy presentes antes que ninguna otra. Se hace pintura o escultura, no literatura. Esta forma de crítica perjudica grandemente a los artistas y se debe a la poca o ninguna cultura que los literatos poseen al respecto, de ahí que desvirtúan por completo el significado de toda una labor.

He tenido ocasión de leer una página del extinto periódico "El Pueblo", dedi-

cada a Herrán y con este significativo título: "Saturnino Herrán. El más mexicano de los pintores y el más pintor de los mexicanos". Esta página está comentada por muchos literatos, muchos de ellos ilustres, y ningún crítico de arte en el amplio sentido de la palabra. Desde el señor Mariscal con su soporífera erudición hasta el sutil y admirado López Velarde han escrito, sin decir un punto de verdad con respecto a la obra de Herrán, con perdón de mi cultísimo amigo Jesús B. González.

Hay en México un criterio erróneo de lo que debe ser la pintura nacionalista. O bien se cree que se hace obra nacionalista pintando un charro, un reboso o una china pobлана o una tehuana más o menos almidonada, o bien se cree que el arte nacional debe ser una copia servil del Calendario Azteca o la Piedra de los Sacrificios. El arte indígena debe ser nada más un punto de partida, debe servir nada más de orientación, pero es necesario hacerlo evolucionar, pues hay que tener en cuenta que ya no estamos en la época, ni es el espíritu nuestro el mismo de los indios, ni los elementos de trabajo son los mismos; es preciso, para hacer arte nacionalista, fundir la parte esencial de nuestro arte autóctono con nuestro aspecto actual y nuestro sentir actual, pero no en su forma exterior, dijéramos teatral, sino en la forma esencial, amistosa; el sólo espectáculo de nuestra natura-

leza nos ofrece un ancho campo para hacer pintura nacionalista, pero fundiéndose con el alma de esa naturaleza, no expresándola en su forma más o menos exterior. Hasta hoy, a excepción de Roberto Montenegro, nadie, con esos elementos, nos ha dado una nota nacionalista. El público se contenta con poco y de ahí el éxito "nacional" del número de las tehuanas en la revista "Peluquería Nacional", pese a los esfuerzos de María Conesa, donde de tehuanas no habla más que un remedo del carácter de las verdaderas tehuanas; a esta misma causa se debe el éxito también de las exposiciones comerciales del señor Best, del señor García Núñez y del señor Fernández.

La obra de Herrán no tiene a mi juicio ninguna cualidad mexicana a excepción de los tipos que él tomó como motivos; todo en él es anecdótico, sin más cualidad que su soberbio dibujo. Su obra se resiente de una marcadísima influencia española y tiene asimismo muchos puntos de contacto con el inglés Branwyng; su pintura es esencialmente española y así como tomó para pintar sus cuadros tipos mexicanos, bien los pudo haber tomado de Avila o Segovia; el color no tiene ninguna personalidad, ninguna característica especial en que pueda adivinarse a Herrán. Hay un caso

(Sigue en la página 26)

Mérida clearly saw as distorting indigenous cultures for the exotic charm they held for urban audiences.¹⁹

Conceiving of hieratic compositions in which traditional women's bodies appeared to conform to the geometric tendencies of their textile patterns also enabled Mérida to present his own works as an alternative to the dreaded influence of Spanish painting. Mérida bemoaned the visibility of Spanish influence in Herrán's paintings and those of other artists, whose work he claimed had been falsely embraced as nationalist by an older generation of poet-critics in Mexico. But his call to reject the long-standing influence of Spanish painting should not be interpreted as a stand against European influence writ large. In fact, shortly after Mérida's solo exhibition opened at the Escuela Nacional, at least one Mexican writer criticized his work for exhibiting a dependency on French Primitivism.²⁰ In a similar vein, when Siqueiros issued his well-known manifesto "Three Appeals for the Current Guidance of the New Generation of American Painters and Sculptors" less than a year later, he too condemned the continued influence of Spanish realist painting in Latin America while suggesting that French avant-gardism might, conversely, offer artists useful approaches to addressing formal questions in their work.²¹

Was Mérida's polemic meaningful in shaping the local, or was it merely a provocative stunt staged by a young, ambitious newcomer? Unsurprisingly, we can answer "yes" to both questions. On the one hand, Siqueiros, in his much more influential "Three Appeals" manifesto from that period, seems to channel Mérida when he denounces trite, picturesque versions of nationalist painting and calls for artists to locate nationalism in artistic form. On the other, viewed within a longer chronology and wider context within Mexico, Mérida's complaints against Herrán were not necessarily out of step with his young contemporaries. Leading theorists and proponents of avant-gardism in Mexico City during the early and mid-1920s, including Manuel Maples Arce (1898–1981) and the French transplant Jean Charlot (1898–1979), were

19 Rick López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 98.

20 A[ntonio] C[astro] L[eal], "Nueva y muy americana labor de Carlos Mérida," *El Universal Ilustrado*, April 8, 1920, 13.

21 Siqueiros issued "Tres llamamientos de orientación actual a los pintores y escultores de la nueva generación Americana" in May 1921 in his review *Vida Americana: Revista norte centro y sud americana de vanguardia* (Barcelona), which appears directly indebted to Mérida's "La verdadera significación de la obra de Saturnino Herrán: Los falsos críticos."

also soon calling for formal responses to the social transformations that had been caused by the Revolution and, in the process, praising the mysterious beauty of objects produced by Mexican artisans. Mérida should not be undervalued, however, as an early voice in these debates and as an outsider. The caustic tone of this modernist critic—who in rejecting Herrán asked an entire generation to confidently turn its back on what Herrán and the critics who admired him represented—surely inspired the spirited young men and women who filled Mexico City in the early 1920s to question other assumptions that historians today should also be revisiting.