

The Eye



Beach, Village + Urban Living in Mexico
San Miguel de Allende · Issue 9
November 2026
FREE

The Art Issue

**The Legacies of Emiliano Zapata:
Apparently, the Personal
was NOT Political**

**When the Sign
Becomes the Artwork**

**“Yes, I Nationalized My Car
in Mexico”**

**The Long Political Tradition
of Murals in Mexico**

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Editor's Letter

**"Great art picks up where nature ends."
~Marc Chagall**

I get very excited when I see a piece of art that resonates with me. And when I can afford to acquire it, I am besotted. Art that I love doesn't just sit on the wall. I will sit and stare at it the way one watches the sky for birds.

I have no idea why some pieces affect me so profoundly, but I suspect it has something to do with the creative impulse we all begin life with. As children, our creativity was encouraged: to play an instrument, to paint, to draw, to write poems and stories, to nurture this creative force each of us has within. Until a point. As we get older these pursuits are treated as childish rather than essential to life. Art has always presented itself as a contradiction.

What is it that causes us to make art? Dogs don't appear to do it and they seem perfectly content. Birds may indeed consider their nests art; a collage of sticks and *objets trouvés*.

In the ocean, off of Seattle, in a patch of garbage it has been discovered that Giant Pacific octopuses are flourishing. These are not the small octopus we eat grilled for lunch, these are huge badass octopi whose arms can span 20 feet. They are creating all sorts of stuff with the things they find. One was found to have made a sort of apartment out of an old fridge and another had collected hundreds of golf balls and arranged them into interesting designs.

Some orb-weaving spiders add zigzags, crosses and other decorative silk patterns to their webs. Scientists still debate their precise functions, which may include attracting prey or warning larger animals away. Whatever the purpose, they produce something that looks remarkably like deliberate design. Maybe we aren't the only species trying to find some order in this world.

Art is rarely a waste of time, even if it isn't good art. Artistic expression is the moment when we sit with ourselves. It is not about finding perfection in a reproduction of what we see before us; it is about conveying some truth that lives within our soul.

Conveying is communication, and maybe that is all decent art is: something that transmits to the viewer an aspect of our collective experience. A painting might capture the light in a certain way or combine colors that remind us of a moment of loss. Someone else might see the same painting and remember something entirely different. That is the magic of art.

While art can be about beauty, I think good art is most often about truth.

See you next month,

Jane



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The Legacies of Emiliano Zapata: Apparently, the Personal was NOT Political

By Deborah Van Hoewyk

Even if you don't know much about Emiliano Zapata (1879-1919), you've probably heard of the Zapatista movement he inspired. Dedicated to the proposition that land should be returned to the people, Zapata, as commander of the Liberation Army of the South, is one of the best-known heroes of the Mexican Revolution (1910-20). When Francisco Madero successfully ousted the dictator Porfirio Díaz and made himself president in 1911, however, he failed to implement any of the land reforms Zapata and like-minded revolutionaries expected.



Zapata went home to Ayala in Morelos (south of Mexico City) and wrote his "Plan de Ayala," castigating Madero and ensuring that the peasants of Morelos would benefit from land reform. The Plan de Ayala was instrumental to creating Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution, which establishes indigenous land rights in communal holdings (*ejidos* and *comunidades agrarias*); it is considered a fundamental text for the Zapatista movement.

The Mexican Revolution was marked by chaos: coups, assassinations, hostilities between northern and southern factions in what was basically a civil war within a civil war. Zapata was a thorn in the side of Mexico's various presidents – none of whom implemented any meaningful land reform, despite the 1917 Constitution. The Constitution had been promoted by Venustiano Carranza, governor of the state of Coahuila; in the wake of the Constitution, Carranza became president of Mexico.

Once in office, he was determined to get rid of Zapata, who took his ragged peasant soldiers into battle whenever his demands were ignored. On April 10, 1919, Carranza's military organized an elaborate ruse to get Zapata to a supposedly secret meeting at Hacienda Chinameca (about 18 km, or 11 miles, south of Ayala). He arrived on horseback and saluted the military lineup; they promptly murdered him in his saddle.

Zapata's Political Legacy

Politically, Zapata left behind a peasant movement that lives on today, mostly in Chiapas. The lengthy dominant-party role of the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*) left many people, especially younger people, feeling there was no political avenue open to them except Zapata-style resistance. As the Revolution faded (it took quite some time for the fighting to stop),

the Zapatistas began a long and complicated history of representing the indigenous peoples of southern Mexico, often clashing with northern anti-government groups

Three events crystallized the Zapatista identity and firmly located it in the Lacandon jungle area of Chiapas as the *Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* (National Zapatista Army of Liberation, or EZLN).

- In 1992, reforms to Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution fundamentally changed the country's agrarian system, ending the longstanding process of land redistribution and allowing new forms of ownership and transfer of ejido land.
- On January 1, 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect, leading the EZLN to declare war on the Mexican government. The EZLN occupied four towns in Chiapas, including San Cristóbal de las Casas; after 11 days of bloody fighting, during which 300 people died, the Mexican government started negotiations with the EZLN. It took two years, but in 1996, the Mexican government and the EZLN signed the San Andrés Accords, granting autonomy, recognition, and rights to the indigenous peoples of Mexico. In other words, the Accords ostensibly restored some portions of Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution.
- Also in 1996, the EZLN convened an Intercontinental Meeting for Humanity and against Neoliberalism, becoming the de facto leader of leftist activists around the world.

As time has passed, the Zapatistas have had less impact on political issues; the EZLN still exists, and still fights for indigenous rights, but their activities are mostly confined to Chiapas. They are opposed to mega-infrastructure projects in the region and maintain ties with European activists. Drug cartels have used violence against local Zapatista governments, causing the EZLN to reorganize in more local collectives aligned with broader Assemblies of Collectives of Zapatista Autonomous Governments" (ACGAZ).

Zapata's Personal Legacies: Men???

Zapata, an icon of machismo, had twenty or so kids with either 9 or 14 women (he only married one of them); he may also have been bisexual, a possibility that has recently been reexamined because of a painting.

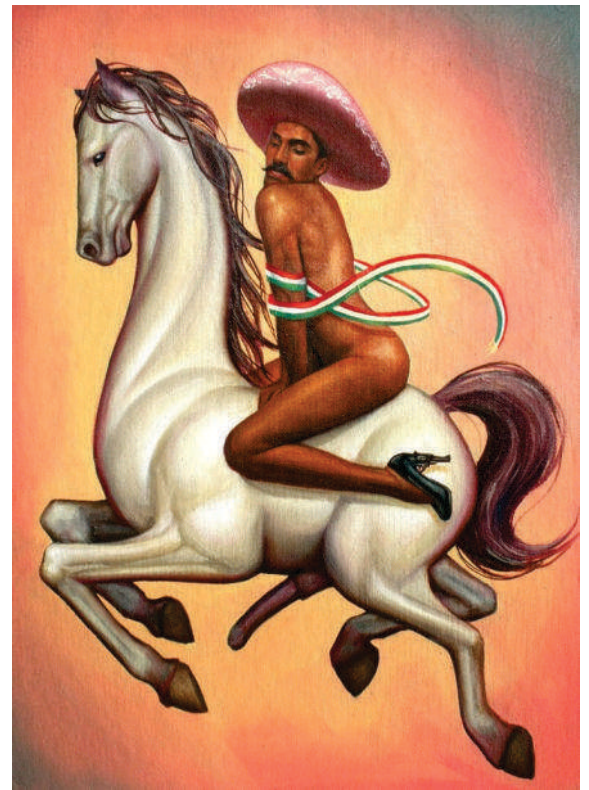
A Controversial Painting.

On Tuesday, December 10, 2019, protesters stormed the usually staid and monumental Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City's historic center. Many of the protesters were indigenous farmers – those for whom Zapata had fought. Their target was one particular painting in the exhibition Emiliano. Zapata Después de Zapata (Emiliano. Zapata after Zapata), held to mark the centennial of Zapata's death.

It wasn't this one ...



Nor was it this one, odd as it may be.



It was this one. Note that the stilettos seem to be revolvers, Zapata's sombrero is pink with painted flowers, and the horse is – um – aroused. The title is *La Revolución*.

Antonio Medrano spoke for the protesters: "This isn't freedom of expression, it is debauchery! It's degrading. They can't exhibit our history that way ... they can't permit this kind of mockery." Perhaps the strongest protests came from Zapata's descendants, who said they would sue to have the painting removed. Jorge Zapata Gonzalez, Zapata's grandson, asserted that "We are not going to allow this! For us as relatives, this denigrates the figure of our general – depicting him as gay."

The artist, Fabián Cháirez, says he was surprised by the cries to take it down, hide it away, or burn it. Cháirez, gay himself, shows a number of similar paintings on his website – *La Revolución* was painted in 2014. At the time of the exhibition, the artist told the BBC he conceived of the painting as a counterpoint to the predominant image of masculinity as a white *fortachón* (strongman – Zapata was called *el caudillo del sur*, another way to say "strongman"); he said he thought issues of sexuality "had already been overcome or [were] under control: inclusion, respect for diversity or difference. Issues such as machismo, misogyny, homophobia." Those who disagree with the protesters see the painting as an exercise in artistic freedom, or as an effort to quell the negative Mexican attitude towards anything effeminate.

The Palacio de Bellas Artes continued to show the painting for the duration of the exhibition.

Any truth to the rumors? While academic historians say there's nothing to the rumors about Zapata and other men, that all the evidence is second-hand, others believe that at least two instances of same-sex behavior are plausible.

In 1906, four years before the Mexican Revolution began, Zapata, 27, met Ignacio de la Torre y Mier (“Nachito”), 40, who had been married to Porfirio Díaz’s daughter Amada since 1888. Rumors of Nachito’s homosexuality had been circulating for years. In 1901, the Mexico City police had raided “The Dance of the 41,” a private ball for 41 men, 19 of them dressed in women’s clothes. Word had it that there were 42 men involved, and that Nachito was #42, but somehow the “son-in-law of the father-in-law” was not arrested. The event was described extensively in the Mexican press, leading to open discussions of homosexuality – and to the notion that the dissolute lifestyle of the elite classes represented a moral failing. Not a good look when Revolution is imminent (you can find the 2020 film *Dance of the 41*, which covers the political aspect of the raid, on Netflix).

Nachito met Zapata at the hacienda of San Carlos Borromeo in Cuernavaca, where Zapata was working in the stables. As the story goes, Nachito invited Zapata to his house on Plaza de Reforma in Mexico City, ostensibly to take care of his horses. Amada spent little time with Nachito, was well aware of his sexual preferences, and kept a diary. Therein she recorded that she found Nachito and Zapata “wallowing” together in the stables.

Zapata’s personal secretary, Manuel Palafox (“The Black Bird”), was a closeted gay; he made cryptic references in his records to behavior that indicated Zapata had other homosexual relationships.

Zapata’s Personal Legacies: Women and Children

Emiliano Zapata may well have had relationships with any number of women that did not produce children, but the record shows he did have children with 9 and maybe 10 women.

Some children died young – a boy of five was bitten by a rattlesnake, a girl of three succumbed to a scorpion sting, several died at birth or shortly after, and a girl of 16 died of meningitis. Of those who lived long lives, only Ana María Zapata Portillo (1915-2010) followed in her father’s footsteps by working for agrarian rights.

On August 20, 1911, after the fall of the Díaz regime, Zapata married one of the women with whom he had children, Josefa Espejo Merino (1879-1968). There is no evidence that he ever divorced her – she died in Ayala. He had successive relationships with the Zúñiga Benítez sisters, Gregoria and Luz, who were soldaderas in the Mexican Revolution.

The role of women, and their children, in Emiliano Zapata’s life is unclear. He was never without one (or more), and there certainly were a lot of them. That Mexicans are interested in his relationships with women as well as with men can be seen in a new play, *Emiliano Zapata’s Women*, which premiered at the National Museum of Mexican Art in June 2023. The play presents women in his life – a midwife, his mother and sister, a lover – building up or tearing down Zapata’s image by sharing their intimate thoughts about him.

Deborah Van Hoewyk wrote and copy edited for The Eye for over a decade. She passed away in 2025 and is greatly missed.



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Art Is the Essence of San Miguel de Allende

From gallery walls to graffiti, from the dance floor to the dinner plate, San Miguel de Allende makes it very hard to stay a spectator.

By Kat Sparks

Nobody moves to San Miguel de Allende and stays a civilian. You arrive with a perfectly sensible plan to relax, and within six months you are throwing clay, taking watercolor on Tuesdays, or explaining to your family back home that you are now "working in silver." This town does that to people. I say it with love, *porque* it did it to my family too.

Galleries

Start where the visitors start. Fábrica La Aurora opened in 1902 as a textile mill and spun cotton until the machines went quiet in 1991. In 2004 it came back to life as an art and design center. Today you wander past painters at their easels while the old looms sit in the hallways like retired uncles who refuse to leave the party.

Then there are the two grand old schools. The Instituto Allende, founded in 1950, brought waves of students south, many of them American veterans on the GI Bill. Plenty never went home, which tells you everything. Bellas Artes, a former convent in Centro, still teaches music, dance, and printmaking around a courtyard so pretty it ought to charge rent. Inside is a mural David Alfaro Siqueiros began in the late 1940s and never finished. I find that deeply comforting. Even the masters have a project they did not get around to.

Graffiti

Right next door to La Aurora, in Colonia Guadalupe, the art comes off the hooks and onto the walls. A little over a decade ago, a festival called *Muros en Blanco*, which means blank walls, invited muralists to paint the neighborhood with the city's blessing. Guadalupe became San Miguel's arts district, and now you turn a corner on your way to buy tortillas and meet a hummingbird the size of a delivery truck.

No ticket, no opening hours, no hushed voices. A kid on a bicycle gets the same show as a collector with a checkbook. And because walls get repainted, the show keeps changing, so go back often.

The idea keeps spreading. Over in Colonia San Antonio, the dog park invited the whole community to paint its walls and the neighborhood children to add their own work. So right there on

the dog park wall, a seven-year-old has a piece on permanent public display, which is more than most of us can say. The dogs, I am told, are very supportive.

Forged in Fire

Then there are the people who make art with heat. San Miguel has been hammering metal for generations. Tin punched into stars and mirror frames, brass and copper beaten into lamps, wrought iron curled into the balconies you photograph without knowing why. Follow the tapping down almost any side street and you will find a *taller* with its doors open.



The glassblowers are the ones who make me hold my breath. A glowing blob on the end of a pipe, a few turns, one long exhale, and suddenly it is a pitcher. No second drafts. They do in ninety seconds, next to a furnace, what I could not do in ninety years. And glass gets a second act here. At Rose Ann Hall's workshop, artisans etch glass by hand against a grinding stone, one flower and leaf at a time, and pour natural candles to glow inside it. It is the rare art you are encouraged to drink a margarita out of.

Art That Will Not Hold Still

Some art here refuses to hang anywhere at all. If you have stood in the Jardín while the *concheros* dance in front of the Parroquia, you know. Drums you feel in your sternum. Shells rattling on ankles. Feathers, copal smoke, and bare feet on stone. They come for the fiesta of San Miguel Arcángel in September and the *Señor de la Conquista* in March. It is devotion more than performance, which is exactly why it stops you in the middle of the street with your ice cream melting.

Twenty years ago, the streets themselves were the stage. In those days San Miguel reminded me of Barcelona, where you stroll La Rambla and the performers are the whole point of the walk. You could not cross Centro without tripping over talent. Musicians in the doorways, performers working a corner for

coins and applause, a crowd forming out of nowhere and dissolving just as fast. You paid with whatever was in your pocket and ten minutes of your afternoon. The everyday kind is still with us. Give this town a band and a patch of pavement and somebody's abuelos will get up and outdance every one of us, with *calma* and perfect posture.

Edible Art

This one is mine. My art is food photography, and I will defend it as art to anyone who has ever watched a chef build a plate. Color, height, texture, a little empty space so the eye can rest. A good mole can take days to prepare and more ingredients than I have patience to count. And then, unlike a painting, somebody eats the exhibit.



A plate is the only artwork with a deadline. My job is to catch it in the thirty seconds between the kitchen and the fork, while everyone at the table waits politely and likes me slightly less. I consider this a fair price. The dish is gone in ten minutes. The photograph is how it gets to live.

Family

I came by all of this honestly. My mother, Joyce, was a Master Tole painter. Tole is the old decorative art of painting on tin and wood, trays and boxes and furniture, built up one deliberate brushstroke at a time. Master is not a word anyone hands out for showing up. It means years of doing the next stroke, and then the one after that.

And then there was my late husband, Agapito. He came to San Miguel and did what this town makes people do. He became a student. He studied jewelry with Billy, learning to saw and solder and polish until a flat piece of metal turned into something a person would wear for the rest of her life. Agapito is gone now. His photo is still on his locker in Billy's studio.

Nobody took it down. That tells you something about Agapito, something about Billy, and a great deal about what a studio really is. It is not a classroom. It is a family that happens to own torches.

November

This is the month when San Miguel makes its most tender art of all. Ofrendas go up in doorways, living rooms, and all around the Jardín, with *cempasúchil*, candles, *papel picado*, *pan de muerto*, and a photograph in the middle. Which, when I think about it, is exactly what a photo on a locker is. A small altar that stays up all year.

A mother with a brush. A husband at a jeweler's bench. A daughter pointing a camera at dinner. A kid with a spray can, a dancer with shells on his ankles, a retired accountant from Ohio discovering she can paint. None of it is decoration, and none of it is extra.

Art is the essence of San Miguel de Allende. It may just be the essence of life, too. This town simply says it out loud.

Kat Sparks is the founder of ExperienceSMA.com and University of Expats. Her art is food photography, and yes, she will make you wait to eat.



Kat Sparks

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“Yes, I Nationalized My Car in Mexico”

By Jackie Kerns-Heigle

“Because you are changing from Temporary Resident to Permanent Resident?”

“Or you came in as Permanente, and now you want to bring your great car here?”

“Just sell your car in the States, and buy a new one or buy a used one in Mexico. It is easier.”

“You don't need a car. Take the bus, or fly.”

“It is difficult to nationalize your car. It is expensive.”

“You drive in Mexico, you must be nuts.”



So at 65 years of age, I did just nationalize my 8-year-old car in August 2026, just prior to becoming a Permanent Resident in San Miguel de Allende. Within 5 days of crossing the border, with all the required documents for export/import, including the *Pedimento* and *REPUVE* sticker, I had my Guanajuato

plates and registration, my emissions inspection and sticker, and my Mexican auto insurance for a year. Luckily, I had gotten my Mexican driver's license months before, or that would have required another appointment booked online within a very small window of time. Don't forget to do that! The whole process wasn't easy. There is a lot of information to navigate, a lot of parameters, requirements, and a good sense of timing and logistics to do it all. But it is legal, and there are some offers out there that are not.

My first step was finding a licensed customs broker who could handle the U.S. export and Mexican import procedures. They are not necessarily easy to find online, but many of the Facebook pages are now posting more and better information.

I called Selop Import and Export LLC in Laredo. An agent there speaks English, and with information about your car, she can give you a quote for the tariff, taxes, and broker fees almost immediately. I sent her scans of documents and other things, like a picture of my car. They needed 72 hours prior to my arrival at their office to process the export through the U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

I emptied my car into the hotel room on Tuesday. On Wednesday, I went to their office to leave the original documents, show my credentials, and make the wire transfer. Thursday morning, I dropped the car off at their office. They even gave me a ride to the veterinarian to get the screwworm certificate for Quesadilla, and then they drove my car to the *Aduana* in Mexico, and brought it back at the end of the day. They picked me up at my hotel and returned me to the office for all completed documents.

Yeah, these were some of the things said to me, often, throughout the 4 years of driving my U.S.-plated car in Mexico as a Temporary Resident, and when boasting that I would eventually nationalize it. Some of these questions/statements irritated me, especially about needing a car at all, or just buying a new or used one. I didn't have to do much math on that one. My car's age was in the sweet spot for importing into Mexico at a 10% tariff. Including taxes and broker fees, the cost came to US\$2,890 for my 2018 vehicle.

I wanted my car here. I didn't want to afford a new car, and I didn't know if I could trust a used Mexican or an expat-owned car. I know these cobblestones here, and I know what I've had to do to maintain my fairly low-mileage car here. And, I like the size of it. It's small enough to fit into street parking spaces—when I can find one! And, I like all the places I can visit in Mexico, with my friends, with our luggage, and with my dog, Quesadilla. And, finally, I really wanted that front license plate!

Maybe then, I wouldn't be waved over at every roadside checkpoint, legitimate or not. I was simply not ready to give my car up — dings, scratches, dents and all!

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I spent an extra night in Laredo because I then needed to get Mexican auto insurance on my nationalized, unregistered car, and I just did not want to drive in Friday traffic with all the trucks. There were still plenty of trucks. Even on La Gloria highway! I spent Saturday night in Matehuala, and was in the San Miguel de Allende offices on Monday morning for the plating and registration process, which turned out to take several hours, and several turns at the window, and well, you've been there before. LOTS of papers, lots of copies, lots of stamps!

As someone once said, go where you have never been. Gotta run. I've got a road trip to plan in my new-used-nationalized car. Oh, what fun!

*Import requirements, eligibility and fees vary by vehicle and circumstances. Readers should confirm current regulations with a licensed customs broker and the relevant Mexican authorities.

Jackie Kerns-Heigle is the former curator of Baldwin Photographic Gallery and Associate Professor Emerita of Photography in the Department of Media Arts, College of Media and Entertainment, at Middle Tennessee State University.

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Mexican Customs (ANAM): www.anam.gob.mx
Information on permanently importing vehicles into Mexico.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection: www.cbp.gov
Requirements for exporting a U.S.-registered vehicle.

REPUVE (Public Vehicle Registry):
www.repuve.gob.mx
Check a vehicle's registration and legal status.

Guanajuato Government Appointments:
www.citas.guanajuato.gob.mx
Schedule appointments for state government services, including applicable vehicle-related procedures.

Guanajuato Vehicle Services:
www.finanzas.guanajuato.gob.mx
Information about vehicle registration, plates, taxes and fees.

Import requirements and fees vary. Confirm eligibility and current procedures before beginning the process.



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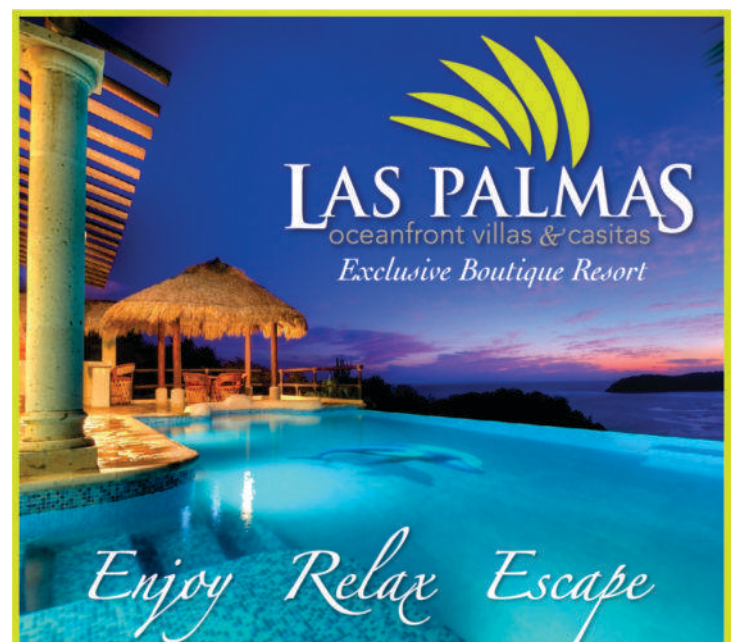
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Painting Beyond the Photograph: Decolonizing Portraiture and the Art of Being Seen

By Kate Van Doren

My paintings often begin long before I pick up a brush.

They begin with a conversation.



Interviewing Nadya Rasheed, Palestinian ambassador to Mexico.

The Healing Words Project is a global collaborative art and phototherapy project I began in 2020, bringing together thousands of women and gender-expansive participants to explore healing through words, portraiture and self-authored storytelling. It began through my work with women who had experienced gender-based violence and has grown to include people navigating trauma, displacement, loss and profound life transitions. Each participant chooses a healing word or mantra, takes part in a phototherapy session and shares their story in their own words. These photographs, words and stories can become the foundation for paintings, drawings, films and collaborative installations. At its core, the project restores authorship by creating space for people to determine how they are seen, represented and understood.

When I begin working with someone, we start with their words during the phototherapy session. It is an intimate exchange in which people express what they have experienced and how they want to see themselves moving forward. I ask them to choose a word or mantra connected to what they are reclaiming or trying to believe about themselves. The photography grows out of that conversation.

The photograph is a beginning, never the whole story.



Kate Van Doren photographing participants Gina Acosta and Isa Castrejón (courtesy of Sean Reagan photography)

After the session, we continue discussing how the person wants to be represented. Participants submit writing about their healing journey. What parts of their story matter to them? Are there objects, landscapes, colors, plants, clothing or other elements they want included?



Writing process and mantra formulation with Daniele Simmons and her daughter Camille during a healing words process session.

Traditional figurative art has often followed a lineage of harm in which the artist holds the authority to look, interpret and define, while the person represented is reduced to the artist's interpretation. The model's name and story can disappear while the artist profits from their face, body and cultural identity.

I am interested in interrupting that inheritance. This is part of a decolonized approach to art making: not treating another person's image, memory or history as material that belongs to me, but recognizing them as active authors and collaborators whose lived experience shapes the work. Their story is not a resource for my artistic expression. The painting becomes a site of relationship rather than possession.

Photography is an extraordinary medium and an important part of my practice, but a photograph is fixed. Painting has no such limitation.

In a painting, I can change and expand anything. I can alter the landscape, light or time of day. I can remove something that doesn't belong or introduce something that was never physically present. A flower can carry memory, a landscape can represent home, and clothing can hold cultural or personal significance. Something that exists only in a person's imagination can become real within the painting.

Once we have developed the idea together, I begin drawing. I often work with PanPastel because it allows me to move between precise drawing and soft, atmospheric passages. I paint primarily on Dibond, an aluminum composite panel, because I love its smoothness and rigidity. It allows incredibly fine marks and lets thin passages of oil move freely across the surface.

I combine oil paint and PanPastel throughout the process. PanPastel gives me softness and immediacy; oil gives me depth, color and luminosity.



Participant Ghada and her reference photo sent to me from Gaza the last photo she took before her home was destroyed.



The final oil painting incorporates Palestinian poppies, symbols of resilience and freedom, with sparrows in the background.

*Beginning Reference photo of participant
Diana Carolina Lopez after her photo
therapy session.*



Final painting after her interview and phototherapy session.

Throughout the process, my relationship with the person remains close. I may spend weeks or months with someone's face. The longer I work, the less interested I become in reproducing the photograph. I think about our conversations, their words and what they told me mattered. The painting gradually separates itself from the original photograph.

If perfect photographic accuracy were the goal, the photograph would already be enough.

What painting offers is time, imagination and possibility. Although my paintings are highly realistic, I want the brushstrokes to remain visible—the record of presence, process and connection.

Sharing each participant's self-authored story alongside the artwork is equally important. I want viewers to hear that person's voice and understand the work through their words. The artwork may pass through my hands, but the story does not become mine.

Technique matters enormously to me—the surface, drawing, layers of oil, softness of PanPastel and decisions about light and color. But technique is ultimately in service of something larger.

It is a way of paying attention.

The photograph gives us a moment. Over time, photography can also document change, holding deep therapeutic value. It allows someone to see where they are, where they were and what they are becoming.

The Healing Words Project also extends beyond art into mutual aid, with proceeds from each painting supporting a charity or cause chosen by the person portrayed. In this way, each participant's story becomes an opportunity for collective healing, solidarity, and meaningful change.

The painting allows us to imagine beyond that moment.

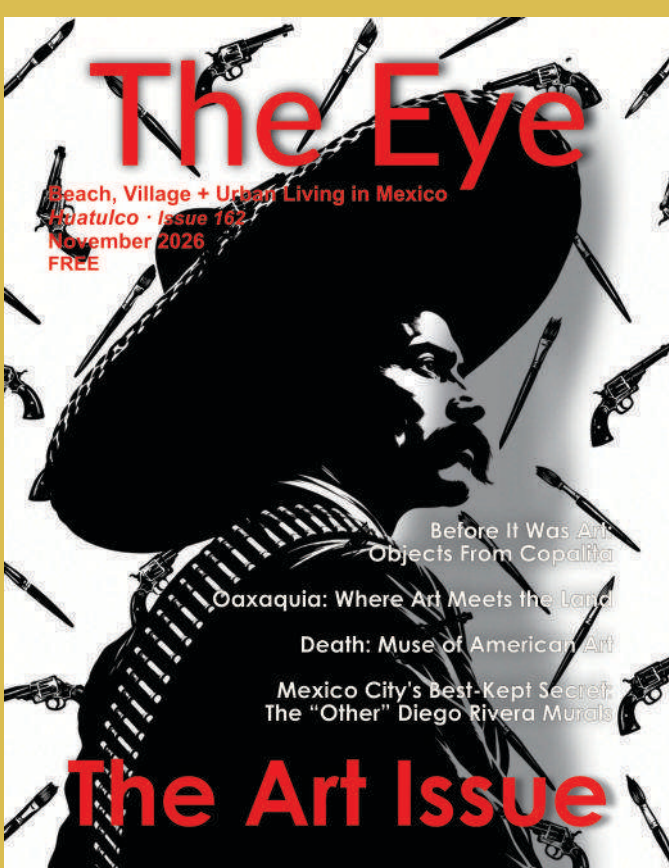
And the person's own words allow them to tell us what it means to be truly seen and heard through collaborative artwork.

The artwork becomes a meeting place: between past and future, pain and possibility, one person's experience and another person's hope. It reminds us that healing is not a finished state but an ongoing act of becoming, and that every story shared with care and dignity can help widen the path forward.

Kate Van Doren is an artist, registered art therapist, and founder of the Healing Words Project, based in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico.

www.katevandoren.com

www.healingwordsproject.com



Did you know *The Eye* originated in Huatulco, Oaxaca and has been published monthly since 2011? We have a fascinating collection of content that you can access online and you can also read the Huatulco edition.

Scan the QR code to visit our website:
TheEyeMex.com



The Long Political Tradition of Murals in Mexico

By Marcia Chaiken and Jan Chaiken

When the word “art” is mentioned in the same sentence as “Mexico” our minds leap to our memories of outstanding “murals.” Whether in the largest cities of Ciudad de México or Guadalajara, or small special places such as San Miguel de Allende or Huatulco, during return visits we are drawn back to experience again the murals that are etched in our minds. And we are always astonished to see details that have eluded us and to learn more about the history that inspired them during our many decades of exploring them.

It seems that a blank wall stimulates human artistic creativity. Some of the walls of caves in the mountains of Europe are decorated with prehistoric drawings of animals that were hunted or perhaps worshipped in the past. And although we found these 50,000-year-old creations awe-inspiring, they did not prepare us for the breathtaking murals in Bonampak, deep in the jungle of the state of Chiapas. In bright colors and detailed drawings, each of the murals in three temple rooms open a window to the life the elite Maya lived there more than twelve centuries ago. Displaying wars, musical events and religious rites, the Bonampak murals also have a political intent that is innate to the best and most famous of Mexican murals through the centuries – in this case establishing the hereditary right to rule of the portrayed nobility.

Centuries later, after the Spanish invasion, Catholic orders also used murals to demonstrate their right to rule New Spain and subjugate the indigenous people. Using artists' techniques developed in Europe during the Renaissance, including understanding of human anatomy and ability to portray visual perspectives, the murals often presented the lineage of specific Catholic orders in tree-like form, tracing the founders and current religious heads of that era back to Jesus. We frankly find these monochromatic murals adorning convents and other religious buildings in cities in central Mexico including Cuernavaca, San Agustín de Acolman, and Malinalco, less memorable and inspiring than earlier and later works. Rather than drawing on the creativity of the native muralists, they were copies of prints from Spain that were painted by people who had been enslaved by the religious orders.

The Mexican Revolution, which began in 1910, challenged the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz and helped inspire one of the most prolific periods of mural art in Mexico. But even before the upheaval in 1910, the writing was literally on the wall. In 1906, Gerardo Murillo, known as Dr. Atl, published a manifesto calling for a distinctly Mexican art inspired by the country's Indigenous cultures rather than European models. Closely allied with President Porfirio Díaz, Treasury Minister Alberto Pani, and the revolutionary Venustiano Carranza, Dr. Atl became the hero and teacher of three major muralists after the revolution: Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros.



These “three greats”, although linked together by art school affiliation (San Carlos Academy) revolutionary ideology and chronology, had radically different backgrounds. Diego Rivera, born in 1886 in Guanajuato, was a child prodigy producing drawings as early as age 2, including sketches on the walls of his home. His parents encouraged his art studies in the San Carlos Academy in Mexico City and then in Europe. Rivera was part of the now well-known avant-garde group breaking traditional forms of art, including Pablo Picasso. Although he was immersed in the paintings of the Impressionists including Gauguin and Matisse, he developed a style that was much more rooted in Mexican indigenous art, using bright colors and flat perspectives.

Orozco, on the other hand, was born in Jalisco in 1883 and as a child moved to Mexico City where his parents struggled financially. They decided that José should become an agricultural engineer and sent him to study in a rural area. Orozco contracted rheumatic fever and returned home to Mexico City. Shortly after, his father died of typhus and, to help support his family, Orozco became a draftsman and then was commissioned to paint portraits of recently deceased people. His interest in art was sufficient to begin classes at the San Carlos Academy. But before he could establish himself as an artist, another tragedy occurred; while he was mixing chemicals for fireworks, an explosion greatly injured his left hand and arm. His left hand and wrist needed to be amputated after they became gangrenous. Orozco struggled on, taking menial artistic jobs – but he was forever sensitized to poverty and pain in the world around him. These are reflected in the grey and red murals he eventually produced.



Siqueiros, the youngest in the triad, was born in Chihuahua in 1896 to a well-to-do family who supported his desire at age 12 to study art and architecture in Mexico City. The young Siqueiros was a firebrand and soon was



part of the prerevolutionary activists who demanded social change – including a successful student strike at the San Carlos Academy. He joined the Mexican Revolution Army at age 18 and advanced rapidly through the ranks. His political activism continued long after the Revolution, and he later became an outspoken Communist whose convictions shaped both his art and his life. His military career continued in Spain during the Spanish civil war. As part of this career, Siqueiros developed a passion for new technology. His murals reflect both the horrors of wars and the influence of technology.

In the decade following the revolution, all three of these artists received government grants to adorn much of the historic central area of Mexico City with their murals. These works are accessible today in the Palacio de Bellas Artes and other government buildings. The House of Tiles, (currently a restaurant and store owned by Sanborns) also has a fine example of a mural by Orozco. The intent of all these murals was less an appreciation of art than political propaganda – portraying the grandiloquence of both the Mexican and Russian revolutionaries. The murals pitted the excesses of capitalism (especially Rivera's) and fascism (Siqueiros') against the dream of the working class achieving independence. Both for Rivera and Siqueiros, fascination with new technology and its promise of freeing the masses from back-breaking labor became a staple topic in their work. For all three, documenting the pain and oppression of humanity under repressive regimes was paramount.

In Guadalajara, Orozco created monumental murals exploring Mexico's history, from the struggle for independence to the violence, contradictions and aspirations of modern society. They are located in the Government Palace of Jalisco, the Museo Cabañas, and the Museum of Arts at the University of Guadalajara. As the fame of the three spread throughout the world, universities and philanthropists, especially in the US, commissioned murals – but for their artistic value and technological portrayal. Some of those who commissioned the murals had not done their homework and were aghast when the portraits of Russian revolutionaries appeared on their walls; in fact Nelson Rockefeller ordered a mural by Rivera in Rockefeller Center covered up and then destroyed because it included a portrait of Lenin. But many murals are still accessible in major US cities and universities. Most of the art is still there as well as the political history.

Drs. Marcia and Jan Chaiken have been married for 62 years and have published many justice system research reports together.

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When the Sign Becomes the Artwork

By Jesús Rafael Arguelles Rangel

A hand-painted sign does more than tell you where to buy tacos, get a haircut, repair a tire, or order a glass of agua fresca. In Mexico, the sign itself often becomes part of the place: letters lean, swell, cast shadows, turn gothic, or explode into color; a smiling pig may advertise carnitas, a fish may point toward a seafood stand, and a price can be painted with as much personality as a mural.

That visual language is easy to overlook precisely because it belongs to everyday commerce. Rotulismo grew as a practical trade, not as something made for museums. Sign painters learned to make a business visible from across a street, often working directly on walls, shutters, glass, metal, or food stalls. The result was advertising, but it was also authorship. Two shops selling the same thing could look completely different because the hand behind the brush was different.

Today that distinction matters more than it once did. Printed vinyl, digital templates, and standardized branding can make a sign cheaper, faster, and easier to reproduce. They can also make one neighborhood look more like another. A hand-painted sign carries small decisions that are difficult to standardize: how thick a shadow should be, which word deserves red, whether a letter should stretch to fill an awkward corner, whether a mascot should be funny, elegant, or slightly absurd.



Those choices have begun to receive formal cultural recognition. In late 2025, Mexico City's Galería José María Velasco opened *Los rótulos no deben morir*, an exhibition that brought together nearly one hundred pieces and presented rotulismo as craft, visual language, and urban memory. In February 2026, the gallery also hosted *Encuentro Rotulismo*. Tepito, where sign painters, artists, researchers, and the public gathered around an art form long associated with neighborhood businesses rather than elite institutions.

The lettering itself tells stories. Researchers at UNAM have noted how gothic forms, for example, continue to appear on food stands, bakeries, wrestling-related businesses, product logos, and tattoos, where they can suggest tradition, age, prestige, or toughness. In a hand-painted commercial sign, typography is never only typography. It becomes a social signal: a promise about what kind of

place you are entering and who it is speaking to.

That is why the old question - is it design or is it art? - may be too narrow. Rotulismo has always needed to work. It must identify, persuade, and survive weather, dust, grease, repainting, and changing businesses. But usefulness does not cancel expression. If anything, the constraint makes the creativity more visible. The painter has to make something memorable while obeying a wall, a budget, a deadline, and a client's request.

A printed banner can do the job. A hand-painted sign can do the job and leave a trace of the person who made it. That trace is what turns a commercial object into part of a city's visual memory. When the sign disappears, the business may still be there, but one small piece of the neighborhood's voice is gone with it.

Jesús Rafael Arguelles Rangel is a Mexican writer and creator whose work explores culture, identity, and storytelling across literature and digital media.

Looking Back: Satisfying Reads of 2026, Part 1

By Carole Reedy

Reading is a deeply personal undertaking that, on reflection, can reveal an unknown side of the reader. It continually gives us new ways to view the world and the roles we choose to play in it.

The following books proved most satisfying to me this year, all unique in theme, approach, and style.

Wild Dark Shore by Charlotte McConaghy

The biggest surprise of the year was this compelling read by an author totally unknown to me. The core of the novel is a topic outside my interest zone, but a rave recommendation by a respected editor/friend piqued my curiosity.

The story takes place on an island off the coast of Antarctica, where an environmental research team has just closed its operation due to rising waters, which will soon overwhelm the entire island.

One family remains to finalize the departure, and this is their story. It's an exciting, intricately plotted story, with twists and turns that kept me on the edge of my seat.

Now I Surrender by Álvaro Enrígue **Sudden Death by Álvaro Enrígue**

You Dreamed of Empires, Álvaro Enrígue's highly energetic and entertaining novel, recently brought him deserved attention from both north and south of the border.

Enrígue's newest, *Now I Surrender* (these words spoken by Geronimo), is a more serious yet equally engaging novel.

Although the story's emphasis focuses on the Apaches, including Geronimo and The Long Walk, it reveals the truly convoluted history of the struggle in the region, now Arizona, New Mexico, Chihuahua, and Sonora, in the early nineteenth century.

Varying points of view zero in on the manipulations of those in power within Mexico and the US in an effort to annihilate the Apaches and other tribes. The manner in which Enrígue analyzes the governments of Grover Cleveland and Theodore Roosevelt addresses the cultural differences of the parties involved and reveals the author clearly in his element.

It is truly a work of art.

I couldn't stop there. I had to read more of Enrígue's work.

Sudden Death (2016) is a rollicking novel starting and ending in the sixteenth century with a tennis match between the controversial dynamic Italian artist Caravaggio and the Spanish poet Francisco de Quevedo, both well known for hot-headed impulsiveness.

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The novel roams from the court of Henry VIII, in which the locks of Anne Boleyn's severed head play a role, to the conquest of Mexico, where Hernán Cortés and his Indigenous interpreter and adviser, Malintzin, play central roles.

Enrígue's imagination and style are unmatched, and his talented translator Natasha Wimmer deserves equal praise.

The Volcano Lover by Susan Sontag

The Art Thief by Michael Finkel

These two books come from different eras. Sontag's novel is set in eighteenth-century Naples, while Finkel tells a true story from the late twentieth century. The lifestyles and circumstances also couldn't be more disparate.

The tie that binds them is an obsession with collecting. The main character in both books is a collector who is fixated beyond reason with obtaining the objects of his desire.

It's difficult to accept the facts of *The Art Thief*. Between 1995 and 2001 a young man named Stéphane Breitwieser casually slipped into 172 European museums in broad daylight and left just as easily with 239 works of art.

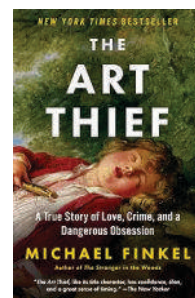
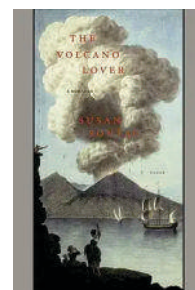
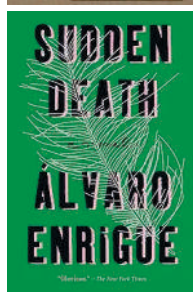
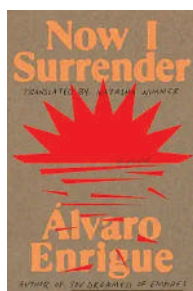
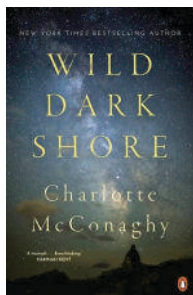
He never sold one piece. He simply took them to his mother's house, up to the attic, where he also lived. Here he had the joy of looking at them. In his own mind, perhaps, he was a pure collector, interested not in selling the works but in possessing them.

Finkel does a marvelous job of telling this story straightforwardly from start to finish. It's both this simplicity as well as the writing that make the book deeply engaging.

The Volcano Lover is a longer, richly detailed story, highlighting the consummate collector British Envoy Sir William Hamilton, who dedicates most of his life in Naples (1764-98) to collecting objects of beauty. He is particularly obsessed with the vases of Italy and elsewhere, becoming a most famous collector held in high regard.

The other significant character in the novel is Mt. Vesuvius, the active volcano that dominates Naples' coastal landscape as well as the lives of the Neapolitans in its menacing shadow.

The outstanding feature of the novel is, of course, the descriptive atmosphere Sontag provides with her precision prose.

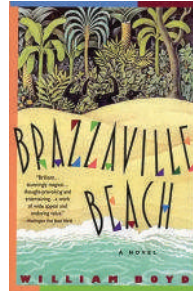
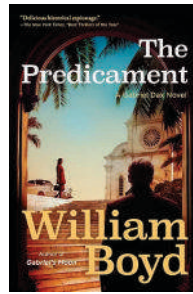


The Predicament by William Boyd

Brazzaville Beach by William Boyd

I find it impossible not to be thoroughly engaged by a William Boyd novel. You sense that each of his books was as smoothly and easily written as it is to read. Of course that cannot be true, as we know authors spend hours mulling over their words. Their editors and copyeditors give equal blood, sweat, and tears to the final product.

Boyd's subject matter varies widely, but never the quality of his writing. In these two diverse selections, one is set at a research facility in Africa and the other is a political detective thriller spanning the globe.



The Predicament is the second novel in Boyd's Gabriel Dax trilogy. British Dax is a travel writer who finds himself caught up in the midst of some rather dicey situations. This gem takes us from Guatemala to Berlin and the US. You don't have to be an espionage fan to become engaged in Dax's adventures. The novels are more about the human condition, focusing on human reaction more than complex plotlines.

The first in this trilogy is Gabriel's Moon, and the third, Cold Sunset, is already published in the UK and scheduled for US release in November. Fans, including yours truly, are eagerly anticipating it.

Brazzaville Beach is definitely not a lighthearted beach story. In fact it's quite the opposite. This serious novel draws in part on Jane Goodall's research in Africa.

Its main character, Hope, is studying the behavior patterns of chimpanzees and is not always in tune with her colleagues' assumptions. Hope also is dealing with conflict from her husband on the home front.

More of my best books of the year to be continued in the December 2026 issues (both Huatulco and San Miguel de Allende editions) of *The Eye*.

Carole Reedy has been writing for The Eye since 2011. She is an avid reader who has made Mexico her home for many years.



Sandra Palma: Where Reality Becomes Magic

By Susan Santiago

Sandra Palma is a Magic Realist artist who lives and works in San Miguel de Allende, Guanajuato, where she is represented by Galería San Francisco in Fábrica La Aurora. Born in Monterrey, Palma moved to San Miguel de Allende several years after earning a degree in International Relations. Once established in the city, she studied for several years with realist master William Martin, an internationally recognized artist who introduced her to the techniques of Renaissance painting.

For many years, Palma worked within a rigorous realist tradition, applying the methods she had learned from Martin. Her subjects emerged from close observation of the world around her, as well as from studying and copying the Old Masters. Gradually, however, she began to move beyond academic technique and conventional subject matter, turning toward a more fantastical visual language.

This transformation brought her into dialogue with Surrealist artists such as Leonora Carrington and Remedios Varo, both of whom lived and worked in Mexico. Palma studied their paintings alongside the work of other artists associated with the movement, while also reading novels by Latin American authors identified with magical realism. These influences became catalysts rather than formulas, allowing her to develop a distinctive vocabulary of her own.

In Palma's current paintings, reality serves as a point of departure rather than a limitation. Her canvases are populated by interwoven figures, animals, plants and symbols that suggest narratives without resolving them. The viewer is invited to look closely, follow the connections among the painting's many details and ultimately construct a personal interpretation of its meaning.

Small details often emerge only after sustained looking, revealing themselves almost as discoveries within the picture. Her paintings recall the imaginative logic of Latin American magical realism, fusing the observed world with the fantastic while maintaining the technical precision of her realist training. The resulting scenes unfold in a dreamlike realm where nature and femininity occupy central roles.



GAIA

Oil on canvas- 23 x 29" in the frame- 2024

SUSAN SANTIAGO

DARLENE OLIVIA MCLEROY

KAREN LEE DUNN

Galería SAN FRANCISCO
SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE

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Encuentro esperado
Oil and gold leaf on canvas - 18 x 34" in the frame- 2025

Vegetation is not merely decorative, and the natural world is never simply a backdrop. Instead, it functions as an active presence—one that shelters, transforms and sometimes confronts the human figure. Through this interplay of naturalistic and surreal elements, Palma creates warm, atmospheric paintings that encourage the viewer to enter an unfamiliar world and recognize something intimate within it.

As the artist explains:

"The canvas is the space where a purely introspective journey materializes. My paintings are not born from a static idea, but from an emotional process that moves from the tension of the first stroke and the doubt during development to the culmination, when the image finally reveals its meaning.

"Within this internal dialogue, I primarily use oil paint, but I also allow myself to work with acrylic and the softness of pastel. With these materials, I construct the structure and depth of surreal worlds where animals, vegetation, and the human figure coexist in magical situations, capturing the fragility and luminosity of these impossible encounters.

"In my paintings, nature is not a setting but a character—one that interacts with, embraces, and transforms the human being. This creates a symbiosis in which the body becomes root and the animal becomes guide. I paint these encounters because I believe we still retain a mystical connection with the wild.

"Ultimately, each work is a record of a personal quest: an attempt to capture that instant of clarity when the strange becomes familiar and magic becomes our true reality."

Palma's paintings have been featured in solo exhibitions at Galería San Francisco and selected for juried exhibitions in Mexico and the United States. Her artistic journey reflects a gradual movement from disciplined observation toward imaginative transformation, without abandoning the technical foundations of her early training.

In her work, the visible world opens onto something stranger and more intimate. Animals become guides, bodies merge with vegetation, and familiar forms take on unexpected meanings. Rather than offering a single narrative, Palma leaves room for viewers to discover their own connections within the paintings—a place where realism and imagination meet, and the ordinary becomes unmistakably magical.

The Art of Imperfection

Why Artists May Need to Become Less Polished in the Age of AI

By Kato Rempel

We are living in a time when beautiful, polished images can be created almost instantly. Artificial intelligence can produce images of remarkable technical sophistication, and we are quickly becoming accustomed to them. So what happens to the things that technology cannot easily replicate?



This is the unglamorous part of making art, but it is often where the real work happens. Frustration forces an artist to look harder and abandon the things they already know will work. A beautiful passage may have to be painted over. An unexpected mark may become more interesting than the one that was carefully planned.

Sometimes the painting you began making is simply not the painting that wants to emerge. Learning to follow that

uncertainty requires letting go of the need to control the outcome. And that is where being a beginner again becomes valuable.

At exactly the moment technology is becoming extraordinarily good at producing polished images, artists may need to become a little less polished. Not less skilled, and certainly not less serious about their work. But perhaps less concerned with making everything perfect. Because the things that make a work imperfect may also be the things that make it human.

The Evidence of a Human Hand

Stand in front of an original painting and there are often clues to its history. You can see where an artist changed their mind. There might be another color underneath the final one. A charcoal line remains visible where an object used to be. Paint has been scraped away and reapplied. One area is beautifully resolved while another is strangely loose.

Sometimes the most interesting part of a painting is the part that almost went wrong.

These things are difficult to appreciate on a phone screen, but in person they become part of the experience of the work. They remind us that someone stood in front of this object and made hundreds of decisions. Some were deliberate. Some were intuitive. Some were probably mistakes. That is part of what makes the object interesting.

For many collectors, an original painting is more than an attractive image. It is an object with a history. The brushstroke matters. The surface matters. The evidence of the process matters.

The Frustration of Not Getting It Right

Every artist knows the moment when a piece isn't working. You may not know exactly why. The color is almost right, but not quite. The composition feels stiff. Something that looked promising yesterday suddenly looks wrong. You change something. Now it is worse.

When Artists Become Too Good at Being Themselves

Most artists spend years developing their skills. Eventually we discover the materials we like, the colors we return to, the subjects that interest us and the methods that reliably get us somewhere. Over time, something recognizable emerges. We call it a style.

This is usually considered a good thing. Galleries want cohesive bodies of work. Collectors like recognizing an artist's hand. Artists naturally return to ideas and techniques that continue to fascinate them. But familiarity can quietly become a boundary. Instead of asking, "What happens if I do this?" we can begin asking, "Does this look like my work?" Those are very different questions. The first contains curiosity. The second contains expectation.

Becoming a Beginner Again

There is something wonderfully freeing about not knowing exactly what you are doing. Beginners are allowed to make bad paintings. They are allowed to use the wrong color, change direction halfway through and discover that the thing they thought they were making isn't actually the thing they wanted to make.

Experienced artists sometimes have to give themselves permission to do the same. That might mean working much larger or smaller than usual. Trying abstraction after years of realism. Drawing instead of painting. Working from life instead of photographs. Picking up charcoal, collage or clay. Or taking a class in something completely outside our practice. The objective isn't to deliberately make imperfect work. It is to create circumstances in which you cannot entirely predict the result. Because uncertainty forces us to pay attention.

Change the Scenery

It is difficult to experiment when everything around us encourages familiar habits. We return to the same studio, the same materials, the same routines and perhaps the same conversations about art. A change of environment can interrupt that comfortable pattern.

In an unfamiliar place, we pay attention differently. We notice the quality of light, the colors of buildings, the rhythm of a street or the way people arrange themselves in a café. Even ordinary things can become interesting again because we are seeing them with fresh eyes.

An artist residency can create that kind of interruption. Removed from everyday responsibilities and routines, artists have an opportunity to spend time with their work without needing to produce a particular result.

There is space to try something, abandon it, begin again and follow an idea simply because it is interesting. Just as importantly, a residency brings artists into contact with people who work differently. Watching another artist approach a canvas, use an unfamiliar material or solve a visual problem can open up possibilities we might never have considered. A conversation over coffee can challenge an assumption.

Seeing someone else take a risk can give us permission to take one ourselves. These exchanges are rarely planned, and their value is difficult to measure. But they can shift the way we see our own work.

Making Art Around Other Artists

Since opening Allende Arts Space in San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, one of the things I have found most interesting is watching what happens when artists with very different practices spend time around one another. Some arrive with a very clear project. Others come because they know they need a change but are not quite sure what that change is yet.

They work, take classes, draw from life, explore the city and talk to other artists. Conversations happen over coffee, dinner or a glass of wine. Someone sees another artist using a material differently. Someone tries something they have not done for years. Someone arrives intending to make one kind of work and becomes interested in something completely different.

Those moments are difficult to manufacture. And they are almost impossible to predict. Which may be precisely why they matter.

What We Might Value Now

Perhaps AI will ultimately change the way we think about art, not by replacing artists, but by making us more aware of what we value in their work. A polished image is becoming easy to produce. A human experience is not.

The hours spent looking. The conversation that unexpectedly changes an idea. The painting underneath the painting. The accidental mark that becomes the best part of the piece. These things are inefficient, unpredictable and sometimes messy. They are also profoundly human.

Perhaps the future of art will not belong to the artists who can make the most perfect images. It may belong to the artists whose work feels most unmistakably human. Maybe this is the moment to experiment. To travel. To work beside people who make completely different things. To pick up unfamiliar materials. To make something unsuccessful and resist the urge to immediately hide it.

Become a beginner again.

Because in a world that is becoming extraordinarily good at manufacturing perfection, our imperfections may turn out to be one of the most interesting things we have left.

Kato Rempel, artist, entrepreneur, and founder of Allende Arts Space in San Miguel de Allende.

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Dining by Design:

Four San Miguel Restaurants Where the Setting Steals the Show

By Michael Solof

The restaurants of San Miguel de Allende reflect the town's architectural history and cultural heritage. From colonial-style courtyards to contemporary interiors, their settings can be as much a part of the experience as the food. Here are four restaurants where art, architecture and design deserve a closer look.

Art Garden Café

Designed by owner James French, Art Garden Café is located in San Antonio, a short distance from Centro. Part of the boutique Hotel Casa Camilla, the café feels more like a private courtyard than a restaurant, with plants, colorful textiles and original work by local artists. Parisian-inspired details appear throughout the space.

After eating, visitors can stroll through the garden and take a closer look at the artwork displayed throughout the property. The café is primarily a daytime destination, and its design reflects French's interest in Mexican culture, architecture and art.

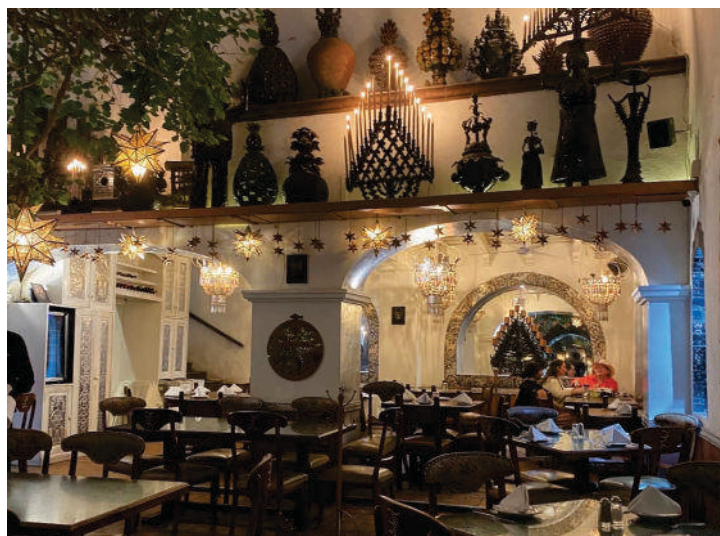
French and general manager Uriel Negrete told me, “Art Garden Café represents our appreciation for art and our commitment to supporting local artists. We believe creativity should be celebrated and shared, which is why art, nature, and live music are such important elements of our identity.”

Néctar Restaurant

Located on Correo, Néctar combines a restaurant serving primarily plant-based food with a tienda that sells hummingbird feeders and nature-inspired home goods.

An open courtyard anchors the restaurant. A tree rises through the space, its branches hung with hummingbird feeders and wind chimes. Stone walls hold art and crafts, while plants and glass ornaments hang overhead. The feeders attract hummingbirds into the courtyard, bringing the natural world into the dining area.

Inside, the design shifts toward contemporary art. Surreal images cover the walls, including work by digital artist and visual storyteller Maggie Taylor, whose art has been exhibited in museums internationally. The combination of artwork, stone walls and greenery creates a contrast between the indoor room and the courtyard.



Manager Juan Carlos describes the goal as an “SMA of old” feeling: peaceful, nature-focused and curated. The hummingbirds, plants and artwork are central to that approach.

El Encanto

On Relox, near the back entrance to the Biblioteca Pública, El Encanto combines indoor dining rooms with an outdoor courtyard.

Inside, natural materials and vivid colors appear alongside Day of the Dead motifs, folk art and other Mexican references. Darker tones and walls filled with artwork give the interior a different character from the courtyard, where guests dine in the open air.

Murals, sculptural accents and collected artifacts fill the space. Moving between the courtyard and the interior reveals different combinations of color, objects and materials, making the décor part of the experience.

Tío Lucas

Located on Mesones, near Teatro Ángela Peralta, Tío Lucas has served steaks and hosted live music for more than 30 years. Its courtyard is an important part of the restaurant's identity.

Most tables surround an open patio, where a large tree spreads over the dining area. Plants and lighting soften the space, while the arrangement of the tables allows diners to enjoy the music and activity around them.

The décor draws on Mexican design, with artisanal objects arranged on shelves lining the walls. Max, the owner, pays attention to maintaining the restaurant's traditional style, from the display of objects to the lighting of the courtyard.

In a town celebrated for its beauty, these four restaurants make their surroundings part of the meal. Each offers a different way to experience San Miguel's architecture, art and sense of place.

Michael Solof leads SMA Adventure Hound, a group which takes locals and newcomers to brunches and dinners at different restaurants every week and he also offers classes in the art of smartphone photography. You can contact him at WhatsApp +1-443-310-9214 for more info and to reserve.

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ON! Gallery:

Where Art, Culture, and Contemporary Life Converge

By Gina Weber

San Miguel de Allende is home to more than 60 art galleries, artist studios, and cultural centers. In a city celebrated for its art scene, what inspires someone to open another gallery? For ON! Gallery, the answer lies in reimagining what a gallery can be: not simply a place to view or purchase art, but a space where art inspires conversation, sparks curiosity, and becomes part of everyday life.

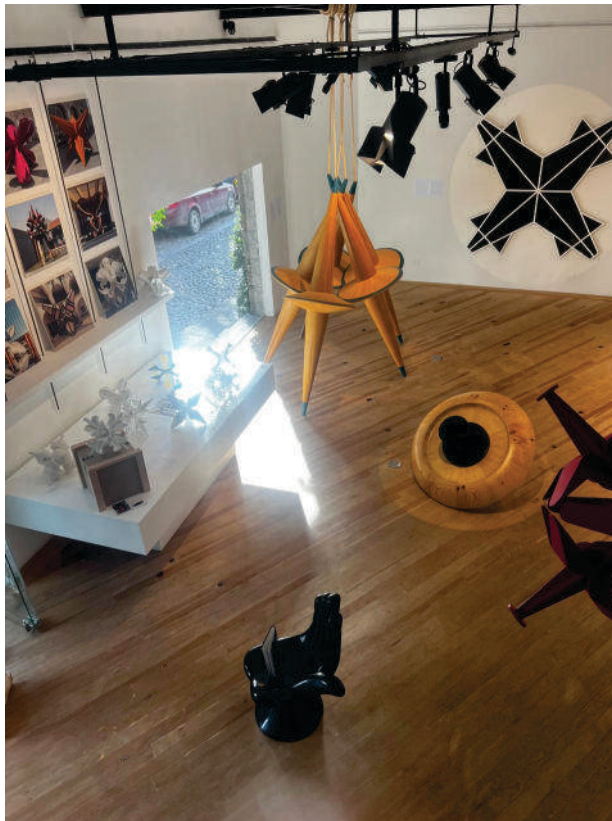
ON! Gallery was founded on January 23, 2026, by Juan Carlos Limón Buergo and Emmanuel Razo. "Our vision is to bring something new to the art scene in San Miguel de Allende, something that challenges convention and makes a difference," Limón explains. "While the city has no shortage of art ecosystems, we are taking a different approach: dedicating each exhibition to a single artist and presenting a cohesive body of work that allows visitors to truly discover and connect with the artist's vision."

Recently, the gallery presented *The Place After the Place* by Benito Rangel de Maria, featuring his Brick project and paper collages informed by migration, memory, and material exploration. It also exhibited *They Have Given Us the Land*, a contemporary ceramic series by Dolores Hidalgo artist Julio César Espinosa, inspired by Juan Rulfo's short story 'Nos han dado la tierra', from his collection *El llano en llamas* (1953). The work reflects on land as both a promise and a burden, revealing the tension between expectation and scarcity.

The exhibitions reflect ON!'s interest in contemporary art in dialogue with Mexico's cultural heritage. The gallery connects contemporary practitioners with traditional makers, including ceramicists, mojíganga artisans, and textile artists, exploring how inherited techniques and cultural memory can inspire new forms of expression. Artist talks enrich the experience, allowing visitors to explore the ideas, processes, and stories behind the work.

Luca Bray: An Exploration of Color and Form

On November 7, 2026, ON! Gallery will open *Yo, Luca Bray*, an exhibition featuring oil paintings on canvas brought from Italy. Through his expressive approach to abstraction, Bray explores color, texture, and material, creating compositions that balance gesture, form, and personal expression.



Color is central to Bray's practice. It defines shapes, establishes relationships, and constructs spaces that draw viewers into the work. Words and personal phrases frequently appear beneath layers of paint, adding an intimate narrative dimension to his compositions. Although best known for painting, Bray also explores sculpture and ceramics, extending his investigation of material and expression beyond the canvas.

In an interview with *Hotbook* magazine, Bray was asked about the significance of incorporating words and phrases into his work. His response was a single word: "Fear." "I write whatever comes to mind, and it immediately breaks the blankness of the canvas, which helps me," he explained. "It's the first stage of the work, because afterward I begin applying colors over the words. The magic is that sometimes the original words emerge through the layers of

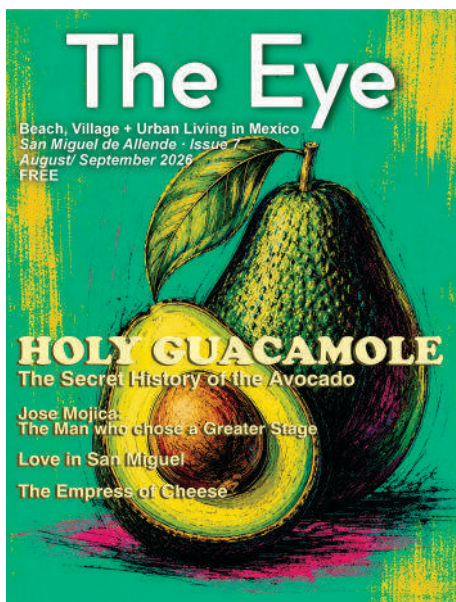
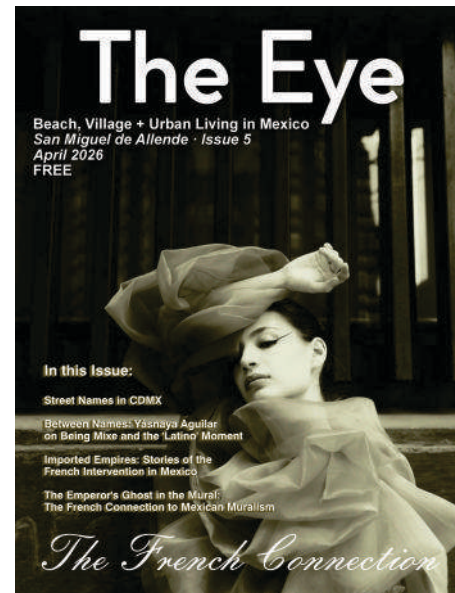
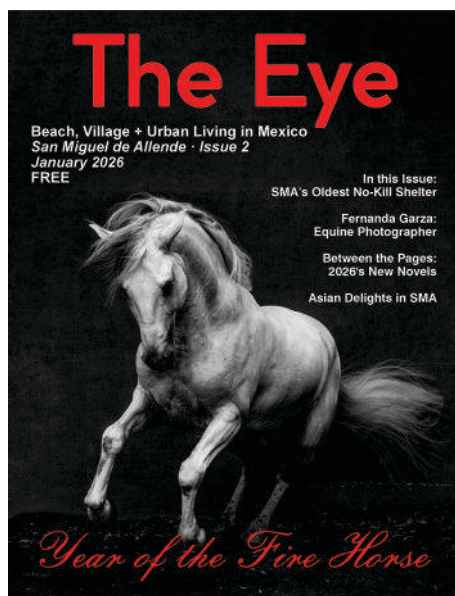
paint, becoming part of the story. I create a written narrative, and at the same time, my mind begins working with color. The two intermingle, and in the end, they coexist."

Limón is particularly pleased to present Italian-born artist Luca Bray, whom he has known for more than 20 years. "I want this gallery to help make San Miguel a destination not only for weddings and traditions, but also for discovering outstanding artists and their work," Limón says.

ON! Gallery

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