

***Staging the Modern Woman:
Antonieta Rivas Mercado, María Izquierdo,
and Performance's Double Life in the Contemporáneos Orbit***

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“The emancipation of women prevails. Her weapons? Perseverance, study, work, sacrifice, and *abnegación*, and the principal of all these, her own femininity.”¹ So declared the unnamed author of a 1930 editorial published in the Mexican newspaper *El Nacional* during a key period of women’s mobilizing in the country. The article, in its proclamation of liberatory advances one decade after the conclusion of the Mexican Revolution (1910–20), nevertheless cites conservative feminine ideals—such as *abnegación*, which promoted selflessness and self-erasure—that circumscribed women to familial and domestic duties. Still, its prescient awareness of gender as a tool that one might wield in service of feminist gains evinces the shifting terrain of traditional social roles in Mexico’s early postrevolutionary decades.

For the actor, writer, and theater patron Antonieta Rivas Mercado (1900–1931) and the painter María Izquierdo (1902–1955), the understanding of femininity as performative in nature, alongside their interests in playing out other formations of womanhood through their work, proved instrumental as they navigated the patriarchal confines of modern Mexican culture. Rivas Mercado, through her involvement with the Teatro de Ulises (1928–29), a short-lived, experimental theater project she funded and whose creative direction she was pivotal in defining, created a progressive arena for the enactment of women’s emancipation. The young actor engaged avant-garde currents in European theater, celebrated collaborative forums for cultural activity, and obscured the boundaries of reality and on-stage fictions as a means of inhabiting complex feminine roles. In the company’s 1928 presentation of Eugene O’Neill’s “*Ligados*” (Welded), for example, Rivas Mercado played the role of an actress and one half of a romantic and creative relationship opposite her on-stage partner, a playwright portrayed by the poet Gilberto Owen. In documentation from their performance, Rivas Mercado stretches her arms wide across the stage, commands attention, takes up space, and enjoys the ways in which the drama allowed her, a progressive feminist, to assume the spotlight in a role not far from her own. Through her adjacent work as a writer, translator, benefactor, organizer, and promoter of Mexican culture abroad, Rivas Mercado located various creative ventures in which to assert her artistic vision and intervene in the masculinist formation of national modernity.

Izquierdo, for her part, limned agency and liberation within the fictive space of painting. Across dozens of images from her series of *carpas*, or itinerant sideshows, the artist depicted women circus entertainers who epitomized feminist ideals of fearlessness, valiance, and defiance. In one example from this group, *La cirquera* from 1932, Izquierdo constructed a scene of gendered emancipation in which a poised circus performer balances confidently atop a white horse. Depicted from behind, the impressive equestrian stands in as a surrogate everywoman who enacts feminist ideals of confidence, self-determination, and an intrepid spirit inside the circus ring. Alongside this resignification of female forms in her works, Izquierdo likewise deployed concepts of performativity in her own life to rehearse different realities and realize artistic success.

Beginning in the late 1920s, these two figures found support for their progressive visions of womanhood through their affiliations with the Contemporáneos, a loosely tethered coterie of collaborators who challenged the parameters of cultural nationalism and broadened narrow visions of *mexicanidad*. This “*grupo sin grupo*,” as the writer Xavier Villaurrutia once described it, embraced gender expressions and sexualities beyond their normative constructions, from *pelonas* and dandies to covert and conspicuous queer identifications alike.² Through the publication of literary reviews, including their namesake journal *Contemporáneos: revista mexicana de cultura* (1928–31), and the production of anthologies, exhibitions, and theatrical works, this open-ended collective staked out an alternative position from which to shape modern Mexican culture. In the case of Rivas Mercado and Izquierdo, their involvements with the Contemporáneos offered a network of support through which to reorient the gendered logics that otherwise regulated their art and lives.

This essay argues that, in finding their respective places within the evolving Contemporáneos circle and Mexico’s cultural landscape more broadly, Rivas Mercado and Izquierdo invoked themes of theatricality, performativity, spectacle, and fiction to trouble social norms and create greater opportunities for agency and involvement. Where Rivas Mercado performed within actual theatrical spaces and Izquierdo, through her paintings, envisioned the daring world of *carpas*, both women explored the language of performance and its detachment from everyday reality to stage novel conceptions of gender and sexuality. In this way, the two figures’ engagements with the stage and its unbounded possibilities informed their fuller understandings of femininity as performed and as a strategic weapon, to recall the opening passage. This nascent approach enabled them to rescript gender roles and their symbolic associations, while also bringing to life their own personal visions—whether through their art or out in the world—for feminist futures and presents.

In Character: Antonieta Rivas Mercado and the *Teatro de Ulises*

By the beginning of 1927, by choice and by chance, Rivas Mercado found herself separated from two men with significant influence over her life. The young intellectual had returned to Mexico City just months earlier, following nearly three years living in Paris and Madrid with her young son, sister, and father, the prominent *Porfiriato* architect Antonio Rivas Mercado. She had left behind a tumultuous marriage with Albert Blair, a British-U.S. engineer who, by most accounts, did not support her academic interests, even going so far as to burn the avid learner’s collection of books.³ Upon her return to Mexico’s capital city, Rivas Mercado initiated divorce proceedings against her husband and, shortly thereafter, dealt with the sudden death of her father. The former event left her with newfound independence and partial custody of her child, and the other with tremendous grief and, incidentally, a great deal of wealth that would drive her subsequent creative ventures.

As fate would have it, mere months later, the twenty-six-year-old Rivas Mercado encountered the cohort of novelists, poets, artists, and actors—the soon-to-be-named Contemporáneos—who banded around a fledgling, experimental theater project, the Teatro de Ulises, and its eponymous journal, *Ulises: Revista de curiosidad y crítica* (1927–28).⁴ Rivas Mercado’s knowledge of and enthusiasm for performance helped to expand the cultural aims of this circle, which provisionally adopted the name Ulises, and created a platform for the early formation of its collective identity. In return, she found a collaborative environment that departed from the masculinist and heroic discourse of cultural nationalism in Mexico and welcomed new modes of social participation.

In popular memory, Rivas Mercado's creative involvement with this faction of intellectuals is routinely underestimated, with most accounts positioning her *solely* as the group's wealthy benefactor. As Kristin Pesola outlines in her monographic study, Rivas Mercado's cultural and intellectual legacy has largely been eclipsed by sensationalized aspects of her life, such as her romantic relationship with José Vasconcelos during his 1929 presidential campaign or her eventual death by suicide in Paris in the Notre-Dame cathedral on February 11, 1931.⁵ Such abbreviated versions of her biography, which remain commonplace to this day, overlook the wide scope of Rivas Mercado's cultural and feminist pursuits, and implicitly confine her achievements to a life made possible by the financial successes of her late father. In contrast, this article, in surveying the activities of the Ulises group, aims to recover Rivas Mercado's activities in and around it in order to posit the various tactics she employed to internationalize Mexican modernisms and trouble gendered expectations in the process.

In the months leading up to the Teatro de Ulises's debut performance in January 1928, Rivas Mercado gathered many of the intellectuals who would come to form the Contemporáneos circle in her home in search of new parameters for Mexican culture. Her connection to these figures originated from her contact with Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, the bisexual painter whom she met following her return to Mexico City and for whom she developed a deep, yet ultimately unrequited romantic attachment. Rodríguez Lozano introduced Rivas Mercado to two of her most important collaborators on the Teatro de Ulises: the writers Villaurrutia and Salvador Novo, who later referred to Rivas Mercado as the "soul" of the group.⁶ The newly divorced mother began to host cultural salons at her home in the Colonia Guerrero neighborhood, where the ideas behind the Ulises theater and journal first came into being.⁷ Rivas Mercado's background in performance made her an ideal figure to hatch a forward-thinking theater program. In her youth, she trained in singing, classical dance, and multiple languages, and through international travel was exposed to trends in European theater, including those pioneered by Paris's Grand Guignol and Théâtre de l'Atelier. Subsequently, in her home, Rivas Mercado gathered emergent playwrights, poets, actors, set designers, painters, musicians, and critics to, as writer Andrés Henestrosa recalled, "converse, read books, listen to music, [and] review the national history in search of the real, definite meaning of Mexican culture."⁸ Through these events, Rivas Mercado fostered a shared vocabulary for the enactment of a modernism that reflected broader avant-garde currents.

The transformation of Rivas Mercado's home into a locus of creative activity corresponded with her interest in expanding the rhetoric of domesticity and challenging restrictive gender norms—activities that coincided with broader political advances for Mexican women during this period. While other notable figures, including Diego Rivera and Guadalupe Marín (and later, following their separation, Frida Kahlo), also doubled the use of their households as creative milieus, the extent to which Rivas Mercado converted the domestic realm into a cultural space reflected, in part, her recently won status as a single mother. As a newly separated woman, Rivas Mercado epitomized an image of the modern woman who reshaped her traditional role as a wife, mother, and household laborer. Her ability to gain independence from a controlling relationship owed partly to revolutionary women's activism in support of the Divorce Law of 1914, which shifted the meaning of divorce from a separation to a legal annulment and attenuated the Church's influence over family relations (despite the fact that men exercised this right with greater frequency).⁹ Still, women like Rivas Mercado would go on to fulfill Carlos Monsiváis's estimation that "if women can separate from men, autonomy is already conceivable."¹⁰ Mexican women made additional legal gains in 1927, the year after the dissolution of Rivas Mercado's

marriage, when amendments to the civil code granted spouses equal grounds to pursue divorce and permitted women to leave their parental homes at the same age as men.¹¹ Amid these moments of social reform, Rivas Mercado modeled a life of independence and autonomy beyond the confines of marriage and subverted the image of the traditional homemaker. (“A wife and mother in the traditional Mexican way, Antonieta could not be,” wrote Henestrosa.¹²) Thus, at the same time that the connections between marriage, maternity, and domesticity began to break down, so too did Rivas Mercado demonstrate a fluid approach to her own inhabited roles of *salonnière*, cultural benefactor, actor, and mother. Through her work hosting periodic gatherings in her living room and the initial rehearsals for the Teatro de Ulises, she leveraged her independence and shifted her household space from a limitation to an arena of possibility.



Figure 1. Julio Castellanos, *Antonieta Rivas Mercado*, 1927.
Oil on cardboard, 135 x 82 cm. Location unknown.

The artist Julio Castellanos, who collaborated on the sets for the Teatro de Ulises and became a central member of the *Contemporáneos*, painted Rivas Mercado’s portrait during this same period of abundant creative activity (Figure 1). The almost life-size image shows the young patron seated with her arms crossed over her lap. She wears her hair in the cropped style of *pelonas*, the decidedly modern women of the mid-1920s who popularized short haircuts as a symbol of liberation, in spite of the backlash and violent threats they received.¹³ Rivas Mercado sits before two overlapping stone walls that fill the shallow pictorial space. While they perhaps belong to an architectural facade, their irregular shape and the gap between them alternatively suggest the portable walls of an artificial stage set. Together with the strong shadows indicative of stage lighting and Rivas Mercado’s position on a piece of household furniture, the image creates an ambiguous setting that simultaneously evokes notions of exterior and interior, reality and fiction, street corner and stage. One imagines that Rivas Mercado, her gaze focused away from the viewer, glances off-stage toward the wings or an adjacent audience. Through this portrait, which was later reproduced in the February 1929 issue of the *Contemporáneos* journal, viewers see Rivas Mercado rehearsing the role of both subject and performer, constructing her self-image in the context of theatrical space and the gaze(s) cast upon her.

As members of the Ulises group solidified their journal and theater, they prioritized new models of experimentation and collectivity that departed from conventional structures of hierarchy and singular creative direction. Rivas Mercado, together with her co-financier, the arts patron María Luisa Block, created a setting where painters, poets, and novelists from diverse backgrounds could collaboratively carry out theatrical productions. Like many of her fellow participants who

assumed multiple, concurrent roles, Rivas Mercado had her hands in myriad aspects of the productions, serving as a creative director, translator, actor, spokeswoman, and more. While she received praise for her on-stage roles, her work behind the scenes saw scant acknowledgement, both during her lifetime and in the decades since. Instead, Rodríguez Lozano claimed responsibility for shaping the Teatro de Ulises in its earliest months, even insisting, in 1949, that “if the Teatro de Ulises in Mexico was founded, it was because I wanted it to be.”¹⁴ His claim contradicts that of Rivas Mercado, who explained decades earlier that her interests in creating a theatrical venue originated in the middle of 1926, around the time of her return from Europe, when “the need to make theater, to have good theater, was pressing.”¹⁵ Sergio Téllez-Pon, too, refutes Rodríguez Lozano’s assertion on the basis that, by the time the company came together, his points of reference for contemporary European theater had become quite dated.¹⁶ Rather, Téllez-Pon credits Rivas Mercado, together with Novo, for advising the group and paving the way for its relationship with foreign avant-gardes. And yet, pursuing one answer to *who* pioneered the company’s identity eclipses its groundbreaking nature—for in reality, it was the group’s collaborative spirit, egalitarian ethos, and de-centering of a single figurehead that enabled it to push Mexican theater into innovative and uncharted directions.

Over the course of the Teatro de Ulises’s short seven-month duration, the company challenged the traditional modes of performance and delivery that had become inscribed within the national canon. From its debut in January 1928, the group offered a theatrical expression at odds with the popular forms of theater of the decade, which favored vaudeville, slapstick comedy, operetta, and melodramatic works, with the latter two forms, as Frank Dauster explains, perpetuating classical Spanish influence.¹⁷ Hence, Lazo described Mexico’s theatrical precedent as the “lethal routine of a false tradition,” in contrast to the Ulises group’s interest in forging new points of cosmopolitan and international reference.¹⁸ With the arrival of the Teatro de Ulises, the experimental program represented, in Henestrosa’s estimation, “a wakeup call in a sleepy environment” and “an invitation to open one’s eyes to the world, to the burgeoning theater.”¹⁹ The company looked past sentimental or caricatural works and instead prioritized new forms of drama, sincerity of theatrical delivery, scripts by foreign-born authors, and an understanding of the rehearsal process as creative and generative rather than prescriptive.

According to Pesola, the group also broadened the available pool of talent, which at the time was dominated by “the rigid and highly commercialized star-system that ruled the Mexican stage,” not to mention the popularity of *vedettes* and vaudeville performers.²⁰ The Teatro de Ulises promoted a new generation of actors, including members of the Contemporáneos like Novo, Owen, and Rivas Mercado, as well as newcomers such as Emma Achondo, Isabela Corona, Lupe Medina de Ortega, and Clementina Otera. The theater’s initial venue likewise broke from tradition: after the group’s rehearsals in Rivas Mercado’s living room, the members transformed a home rented at calle de Mesones 42 in the historic center into an intimate theater that accommodated fifty invited guests. In the summer, the theater opened itself to larger audiences when it took up temporary residence at the Teatro Virginia Fábregas, a sizable commercial theater in Colonia San Rafael, where it mounted performances before a wider public until the company disbanded in July 1928.

While the Teatro de Ulises gained considerable press for its avant-garde forays, a wave of disparaging reviews contributed to the theater’s short lifespan. From the beginning, critics accused the theater of promoting a repertoire of universal, rather than nationalist appeal.²¹ Other commentary remarked on the unusual experience of viewing the performances, noting the

peculiarities of the venue at calle de Mesones 42, the use of a curtain drawn across the stage, and the absence, as was routine in Mexico City, of a bell to call audiences to their seats.²² The general inability of critics to engage with the content that the Ulises circle put forth testifies at once to the group's departure from theatrical traditions and to the formation of rigid criteria for what critics deemed suitable under the nationalist rubric of postrevolutionary culture.

Despite these accusations, the Ulises circle never entirely abandoned local concerns, but rather absorbed narratives that responded, if more abstractly, to the social realities of modern Mexico. Their choice of theatrical works by such playwrights as Jean Cocteau, Eugene O'Neill, and Claude Roger-Marx enabled them to stage the possibility of a cultural position that extended beyond its national confines and took into account a broader range of perspectives. The group's members mounted and published texts that offered counternarratives of the Revolution, limned mythology and folklore, related foreign literature to their own situations, and pushed beyond the scope of the accepted postrevolutionary record. They presented theater that spanned personal experiences and collective crises and provided an outlet beyond the heroic and melodramatic. Through the lens of experimentation, they expanded both conventional modes of theatrical production and the kinds of stories that belonged within the self-image of the modern nation. For women, who, in the words of Adriana Zavala, saw their presence in Mexican society reduced to archaic "templates of ideal femininity" both during and after the Revolution, this kind of theater project opened up roles beyond those available on the traditional stage or in daily life.²³ Indeed, the Teatro de Ulises welcomed and was made possible by visionary women who saw the potential of theater to transform a society whose postrevolutionary government walked back its revolutionary promises of women's emancipation.

Throughout her time with the Ulises group, Rivas Mercado took advantage of performance as a means of staging a liberated self. According to Vicky Unruh, "her propensity for masking . . . constituted an apt bond with the Contemporáneos writers, some of whom negotiated their coming-out as homosexuals . . . with leadership roles in the growing cultural bureaucracy."²⁴ Numerous descriptions of Rivas Mercado from the late 1920s reveal how she envisioned her life as a sustained character study, dramatizing and downplaying aspects of her identity as she saw fit. The journalist Fernando Ramírez de Aguilar (writing under the pseudonym Jacobo Dalevuelta) noted in an early review of the Teatro de Ulises that Rivas Mercado "inhabited her role so intensely that in many moments she could succeed in erasing the idea of fiction."²⁵ This collapse of the real and the performative, which Castellanos thematized in his 1927 portrait (see Figure 1), appears to have operated in both directions, with many observers likewise characterizing Rivas Mercado's ordinary presence as what Unruh calls "a self-aware performance."²⁶ Rivas Mercado, it seems, embraced the performativity of the everyday as a strategy that allowed her to navigate the traditionally masculine realm of Mexican culture; indeed, the transformation of her own home into a cultural salon and rehearsal studio, as well as the origins of the theater within domestic space, reflect these blurred lines of private and public selves. Rivas Mercado commented on her and her peers' commitment to preparation and perfection, insisting upon the importance of "carefully choosing the works, rigorously memorizing the parts, [and] painstakingly studying the staging. In short, leaving nothing to chance."²⁷ This methodical ethos mirrors the ways that Rivas Mercado chose to fashion herself in response to the then-limited cultural and social opportunities that characterized early-twentieth-century Mexico. Through the promotion of an experimental theater program and simultaneous assumption of a performative persona in her everyday life, she found a way to imbue new modes of being into both the stage and her vision of modern womanhood.

In her work championing the Teatro de Ulises, Rivas Mercado opened an arena for innovative theatrical approaches and progressive social roles. In February 1928, shortly after the theater's debut, she published an article titled "La mujer mexicana" in the Madrid newspaper *El Sol*. In it, she discussed what she perceived as women's limited influence on Mexican society due to a "strange concept of female virtue that consists of a 'do-nothingness' [*un 'no hacer.'*]"²⁸ By calling out the constraints posed by traditional social ideals for women, Rivas Mercado highlighted the need for a new feminine symbolic order. She ruptured gendered stereotypes of *abnegación*, submission, and idleness to not only imagine, but also embody feminine possibility. In and outside of the theater, she tried on methods of motherhood, marriage, patronage, and professional success that troubled accepted archetypes for the quintessential Mexican woman. Thus, through her support of the Ulises group and essential place within it, Rivas Mercado created an alternative arena in which to write her own feminist present.

María Izquierdo's Balancing Acts



Figure 2. María Izquierdo, *Untitled Nude*, ca. 1929. Location unknown.

María Izquierdo published four images in the September 1929 issue of *Contemporáneos*: one still life, two portraits of men, and a striking nude (Figure 2). In this now-lost painting, the female subject perches on the edge of a bed, one arm pulling her leg toward her, the other lodged into the tousled floral bedding. Her hunched posture, angular pose, lopsided breasts, and creased stomach embrace the irregularity and asymmetry of the body at rest. The figure's head cocks to the side and gazes beyond the frame, her eyes highlighted by smoky rings of makeup. A small table behind her displays a portrait of a male general, an unlit candle, and a bottle of wine with its cork wedged in midway. By the side of the bed lie piles of clothes discarded during what one presumes has been a sexual encounter. Izquierdo compiled an unromantic image of the post-coital subject who lingers among the spoiled signs of sexual activity. Women, Izquierdo seemed to imply, have other lives, other moments, beyond that of the romantic object, a self that outlives the erotic male gaze. The solitary subject registers the weight of womanhood in a world built on the wants and desires of men, yet at the same time, she defies the roles in which women in Mexico have traditionally been cast. Much like Izquierdo herself, this painting engages a modern femininity liberated from the persistent tropes of timeless allegory or idealized erotic symbol.

Izquierdo's decision to feature this nude in *Contemporáneos* provides insights into her perception of the artistic and literary circle that had formed around the journal and the ways she

utilized her position within it to navigate the rigid cultural environment in Mexico. The artist's time with the *Contemporáneos* marked a turning point in her career, providing a public platform, an artistic community beyond the dominant nationalist discourse, and the stimulus to develop a body of work that re-signified the female form. This moment marked an active period in which Izquierdo, as Zavala has argued, "appropriated and reformulated dominant, male, heterosexist nationalism."²⁹ The artistic position that Izquierdo defined through her affiliation with the *Contemporáneos* anticipated her exploration of an unrestrained femininity in her *carpas* series, a group of paintings in which female performers achieve bold technical feats, support one another, and transgress expectations of submissiveness and *marianismo*. These images thematize the importance of spectacle for Izquierdo: as a subject of cultural debates, the painter relied on the strategic performance of femininity and *mexicanidad* to navigate the gendered artistic terrain of the postrevolutionary period, while through her art, she envisaged liberated women who troubled their masculinist environs through the theatrical space of the circus. Playing into and against these varied positions, Izquierdo visualized fantastical scenes of performance from which a new feminine logic could emerge.

Izquierdo's publication of the untitled nude in *Contemporáneos* in 1929 coincided with a moment of patriarchal and paternalistic attempts to control her place within the cultural landscape. Earlier in the year, Izquierdo entered the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes (ENBA) and met Rivera, then the school's director, who subsequently claimed to have "discovered" the up-and-coming painter and endeavored to subsume her into the prevailing nationalist discourse of a true Mexican art. Rivera wrote two essays on Izquierdo and arranged for an early exhibition of her work at La Nueva Galería de Arte Moderno; his support, however, also sparked outrage at ENBA, as evidenced by a jolting incident where students tossed buckets of water at Izquierdo as she fled from the school.³⁰ While these precarious few months of support by the muralist ignited Izquierdo's awareness of herself and her art as part of broader national and cultural debates, they also spurred her creation of a deliberate professional persona and aesthetic approach. In fact, Zavala contends that Izquierdo was "astute in allowing herself and her work to be 'claimed' by a cultural agent as powerful as Rivera while simultaneously integrating herself into the *Contemporáneos* circle."³¹ From this dilemma, Izquierdo emerged with a sense of the obstacles and openings that would limit or enable her success as an artist.

The reproduction of Izquierdo's nude portrait in *Contemporáneos* and, three months later, in an essay authored by Rivera illustrates the ways that she strategically negotiated her place within competing cultural groups. With the *Contemporáneos* circle, Izquierdo found a network of artistic and literary figures who aspired to broaden the parameters of Mexican culture, undermine notions of artistic hegemony, and introduce difference as part of the national visual language. She likely grew acquainted with the *Contemporáneos* toward the end of 1928 through her relationship with the painter, and soon her partner, Rufino Tamayo.³² Izquierdo's spread in *Contemporáneos*, the only solo feature by a woman artist across the journal's forty-three issues, was titled simply, "Óleos de María Izquierdo."³³ The section omitted interpretive text, as was customary for the review, and offered an unmediated look at four recent paintings by the artist. One imagines that this non-didactic format would have appealed to Izquierdo, as it provided a rare opportunity for her work to speak and be received on its own terms.

In December 1929, the same nude reappeared in a five-page spread on Izquierdo in the English-language magazine *Mexican Life*. The piece reproduced and translated an essay that Rivera had written for Izquierdo's first solo exhibition the month prior. Rivera's calculated praise framed the

reception of Izquierdo's nude and a selection of her other portraits that spanned the feature: "This girl [Izquierdo] possesses the handsome sharpness of an already ripe spirit," he wrote.³⁴ "Her person is like her painting: classically Mexican."³⁵ Rivera attempted to use Izquierdo's artworks, her gender, and—as his physical descriptions of the painter reveal—her appearance as fodder for the definition of an authentic, nationalist, and timeless Mexican art. In the context of Rivera's words, Izquierdo's nude functions as an unintended proxy for the painter's own consumption by masculinist discourse. An image created to record the aftermath of masculine desire maps her own exploitation by Rivera, a figure who, shortly thereafter, would disown Izquierdo's aesthetic approach and even sabotage a mural commission that she received in 1945.³⁶ The female nude, therefore, functions like a surrogate for the artist herself, its repetition across two printed contexts reenacting the double-edged nature of Izquierdo's absorption by cultural factions.

Throughout her career, and especially in its early stages, Izquierdo demonstrated a keen awareness of how her ambitions as an independent woman and artist related to and could be advanced by her perception by other cultural figures. This intimacy with not only a liberated self-image, but also the spheres in which it might flourish, comes to life in her paintings of circus performers, a series that she returned to repeatedly in the 1930s and early 1940s. Through dynamic depictions of active, intrepid, and skillful women on stage at the circus, Izquierdo explored a theatrical sphere in which her own experiences of performing gender were carried out to new logical ends.

Izquierdo's relationship to the circus dates back to her childhood, when itinerant *carpas* and sideshows cropped up in her hometown of San Juan de los Lagos.³⁷ Several sources attest to Izquierdo's fascination with the circus: according to her younger daughter, Aurora Posadas Izquierdo, the painter occasionally visited the circus during off-hours to watch the performers rehearse.³⁸ The photographer and close friend of the artist Lola Álvarez Bravo suggested that "the pleasure that María got from the [circus performers] was not that of the spectator; rather she seemed almost to be inside, like another popular element."³⁹ Izquierdo thus seems to have identified with the circus performers on a profound level, seeing their world as a kind of transient utopia apart from the limitations of her strict Catholic upbringing and onerous responsibilities as a single mother. In this realm, suspended halfway between fiction and the real space of everyday life, Izquierdo observed likeminded women who served as protagonists, took calculated risks, defied expectations, and received recognition for their fearlessness, merit, and skills.

The earliest group of Izquierdo's circus scenes from 1932–33 focused on individual performers and single, controlled acrobatic stunts. In works such as *La cirquera* and *Caballista del circo*, female performers outfitted in graceful attire balance on one foot atop galloping white horses. Their poised statures dominate the spare compositions, which exclude any scenery that would easily identify the backdrop as a circus. Instead, the austere settings blur the distinction between the existence of actual horsewomen in traveling *carpas* and Izquierdo's creation of these liberated performers as a modern feminine ideal.



Figure 3. María Izquierdo, *Autorretrato*, 1933.
Oil on canvas. Location unknown.

In 1933, Izquierdo painted a self-portrait in which she, too, occupies the circus environment (Figure 3). A slight curve across the top of the composition suggests the circular perimeter of the circus ring, inside of which a white steed sprints across the floor. In the immediate foreground, Izquierdo painted herself before a fence post, which perhaps marks the outer edge of the ring or represents an obstacle mounted within it. Her appearance in this work is remarkably pared-down: she wears her hair down, little if any visible cosmetics, and a knotted scarf that drapes across her simple blouse—a stark contrast to other self-portraits by Izquierdo from the early 1930s where she presented herself highly made-up and in styles ranging from Tehuana dress to modern attire. Izquierdo regularly painted herself in elaborate braided hairstyles, dark makeup, and eye-catching clothing and jewelry. By crafting a visible self-image that deployed both pre-Hispanic customs and contemporary fashion, she presented herself as quintessentially “Mexican” in a way that appealed to and fascinated her male peers.⁴⁰ By comparison, her self-portrait in the circus represents one of the least staged paintings of Izquierdo in existence and suggests how *carpas* constructed a reality for the artist separate from her creative persona. While her circus scenes celebrated the performance of a modern femininity, Izquierdo also saw this performative mode as one where the authentic, unadorned self could assume the stage—indeed, for the artist, the two coexisted in her understanding of herself.

Izquierdo’s circus paintings from the end of the decade expanded her focus on performance to group routines and backstage settings that explored relationships, dependency, and selves beyond the stage. In these collective scenes, each performer adds to the overall collaborative spirit, sharing the circus ring rather than competing for centerstage. The sheer range of acts that Izquierdo depicted—acrobatics, gymnastics, dance, balancing stunts, and equestrian tricks—created a constellation of possibilities for her talented and daring subjects. The results produce feminist realities: self-contained worlds of fantasy, self-assuredness, kinship, and support.



Figure 4. María Izquierdo, *En el circo*, 1939.
Gouache on paper, 41.9 x 49.5 cm. Collection Marilyn Maxwell, Santa Fe.

The artist incorporated an actual audience in *En el circo*, a rare sighting across her *carpas* series (Figure 4). In the upper register, a pair of tightrope walkers execute a challenging routine as they meet toward the center of the suspended wire. Even as they wobble slightly—one on a single foot, the other bracing herself on one knee—an intergenerational group of three women and two children cheer them on from their seats in the foreground. These audience members sit at the edge of the ring and immerse themselves in the act, applauding this treacherous segment of the show. They function in a way similar to the trapeze net positioned beneath the aerialists, forming a supportive zone and encouraging the performers to persevere. Through this glimpse onto the outer limits of the ring, Izquierdo hinted at the sense of community that can sustain leaps into the unknown.

Izquierdo's choice of *carpas* as artistic subject matter throughout the 1930s illustrates her understanding of performance as a pivotal tool for rewriting traditional gender norms. The circus offered a realm between fantasy and reality where women carved out space, asserted agency, and gained recognition through their mastery of technical skills. It served as a popular venue in which women could express virtues beyond the commonplace tropes of submissiveness, modesty, and maternity. The idea of the circus as a parable of modern liberation allowed Izquierdo to explore the performativity of femininity within everyday life, as she forged a personal association with the circus artists and the ways they circumvented social expectations in pursuit of their craft.⁴¹ Further, the imagery of *carpas* also underscored the specific ways in which performance could be assumed as a strategy to rehearse different realities. Izquierdo highlighted how women entertainers embodied performative selves in the circus ring as a means of recalling the ordinary enactment, and therefore mutability, of feminine identity in daily life.

Much like the aerialists and acrobats she depicted, Izquierdo walked a fine line between competing cultural agendas to ultimately pave her own path as a professional artist. In the transcript for a radio broadcast that Izquierdo delivered at an indeterminate date between 1934 and 1944, the painter laid bare her views on the gendered obstacles that circumscribed her and other women artists' experiences.⁴² The address, titled "La mujer y el arte mexicano," is anchored by a critique of women's exclusion from formal artistic training and the ways this has hindered their ability to contribute to the history of art—a prophetic precursor to Linda Nochlin's 1971 essay and feminist mainstay, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?"⁴³

Izquierdo, in her broadcast several decades prior, proposed strategies that would enable women to prevail over these historical biases:

I think that for a woman to achieve success,. . . she ought to have an ample spirit of self-criticism and of struggle, and never lose her femininity, always feel physically and spiritually like a woman, feel with force in order to create, never feel inferior or superior to man, and always consider him a companion in equal conditions. All this is difficult to attain, but if a woman achieves consciousness, has ambitions, directs her forces, knows what she wants to conquer... . then I am really sure that she will triumph as long as she can overcome the obstacles that arise.⁴⁴

In this speech, Izquierdo's rhetoric of gender essentialism positions femininity itself as an important factor in women's emancipation. She insisted that women must not abandon their gender, but rather view self-assertion as an extension of their feminine identity. Still, according to Izquierdo, the feminine woman is "spiritual, self-sacrificing and humane. Her ethics are clean, and she is happy to be a mother, because she has in herself a creative force."⁴⁵ At first glance, this description undermines the feminist visions represented in her work. This type of language, however, belonged to a relatively conservative view shared by many self-identifying, middle- and upper-class feminists in Mexico. Further, Celeste Donovan cautions against a literal reading of public statements by Izquierdo such as these, which "strategically navigated a social terrain in a way that would advance her own progressive principles while making them palatable enough to the ears of social convention."⁴⁶ In shaping her public persona, Izquierdo likely elided overtly feminist remarks that may have risked being seen as radical or threatening to the status quo. Even as she balanced this ambivalence in her daily life, Izquierdo's circus paintings reveal a different reality, one in which she set into motion feminine subjects, agency, and control.

Antonieta Rivas Mercado and María Izquierdo: Duet

It is unclear the extent to which Rivas Mercado and Izquierdo were acquainted.⁴⁷ While they undoubtedly knew one another and frequented similar spaces, no evidence exists of any active collaboration or significant personal relationship between the two. Nevertheless, the pair bears a multitude of similarities that come into relief through an examination of their time with the Contemporáneos circle and experiences within the landscape of Mexican modernisms. As I have argued, Rivas Mercado and Izquierdo saw performance—both literal and imagined—as a way to rehearse feminist scenarios that pushed beyond the narrow confines of traditional values and cultural nationalism in the early twentieth century. The potential for theatrical expression to bridge fiction and reality, the stage and the quotidian, offered a powerful means of redefining social expectations of femininity and enacting emancipated selves across the realms of theater, painting, and beyond.

In the case of Rivas Mercado and Izquierdo, the alternative cultural current championed by the Contemporáneos offered greater flexibility in which to challenge and reorient the gendered parameters of the postrevolutionary era. Many observers saw little distinction between the women and the predominantly queer men of the Contemporáneos orbit. The Bolivian writer Tristán Marof perceived both in a derogatory light, declaring: "Between the 'faggot' group [*grupo 'jotista'*] and women there is really little difference... . I cannot understand why such charming ladies have chosen the hard work of writing to please the bourgeoisie."⁴⁸ Although Marof appears more sympathetic to the agreeable literary and artistic women, he still sees them as deserting their customary social roles and serving the cultural elite. Furthermore, Marof's

diminishment of women's cultural contributions dismisses both their visibility and the multifacetedness of femininity.

Still, in a cultural environment that quickly cast judgment on women who assumed untraditional roles, the Contemporáneos network offered a valuable affinity through which to defy sexual and gender norms. As Zavala writes of Izquierdo, in the 1930s, the painter “allied herself with dissident groups, among them cultural cosmopolitans, homosexuals, and even estranged French Surrealists, who actively used their difference to create new spaces not only in the margins but increasingly at the center of the cultural order.”⁴⁹ Rivas Mercado and Izquierdo's tactical affiliations with the Contemporáneos therefore signaled a desire to align themselves with other sidelined individuals with whom they could transform the discourse of modernism. They knowingly identified the Contemporáneos collective as one that would support a broader range of artistic expressions and construct other Mexicos in which multiple femininities could coexist.

The restrictive boundaries and strong patriarchal overtones of cultural nationalism oftentimes impelled women to identify unconventional tactics to influence the Mexican state's present and future.⁵⁰ For instance, the degree to which male figures attempted to “claim” Rivas Mercado and Izquierdo illustrates the fraught and possessive nature of this masculinist realm. Rivas Mercado, following her time with the Ulises and Contemporáneos circles, joined Vasconcelos to chronicle his presidential campaign; after Rivas Mercado died months later by suicide, her once-unknown “suicide note,” which partially pointed to Vasconcelos's romantic rejection of her, was later published in a collection of her texts. However, Pesola claims that this note, attributed to Rivas Mercado, was actually ghostwritten by Vasconcelos in an attempt to assert his own virile legacy by reserving for himself the position of the unattainable lover.⁵¹ Relatedly, Rivera, as previously discussed, pigeonholed and laid claim to Izquierdo in order to bolster his specific vision of that which constituted an authentic, albeit primordial *mexicanidad*. This manipulation of Rivas Mercado and Izquierdo as cultural pawns relates to broader discourses of gender and control in the 1920s and 1930s. As Mary Kay Vaughan notes, in a moment where the Revolution had expanded women's access to previously off-limit public arenas, “threatened artists and intellectuals turned women into traditional archetypes they could control.”⁵² The remnants of this patriarchal desire to contain women and reassert power over them through symbolic means infiltrated broader cultural practices. For example, in addition to the examples of Rivas Mercado and Izquierdo, in 1925, the Estridentista writer Arqueles Vela organized a fictitious sale of women in the periodical *El Universal Ilustrado*.⁵³ The piece priced different feminine archetypes according to their amenability and appearance, and auctioned off the “common woman” (\$12.50, price reduced from \$25), “beautiful woman for the mornings,” “complicated woman for the afternoon,” and “woman for the theater.” This hyperbolized commodification of women literalizes the more subtle manipulations that Rivas Mercado and Izquierdo experienced, highlighting the overarching cultural attitudes with which the pair had to contend and, ultimately, overcome.

During this period of rapid shifts in the meanings of gender, demands for women's rights, polarized views of feminine virtue and social roles, and heightened attempts to restrict female participation in public and professional spheres, women like Rivas Mercado and Izquierdo assumed alternative positions from which to intervene in modern culture. For the two, themes of performance, fiction, spectacle, and gender formed the core of their aesthetic and professional practices, which found support in the form of the Contemporáneos circle. Rivas Mercado's work with the Ulises group provided a backdrop for her to stage experimental performances and

express feminist ideals, whereas Izquierdo invoked the image of circus performers to allegorize her own desire for artistic and personal freedoms. Seen in tandem, both figures embraced the possibility for cultural practices to conjure up new social scenarios and modern femininities that they hoped might translate from imagined fictions to postrevolutionary norms.

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¹ *El Nacional*, June 8, 1930, 8, quoted and translated in Jocelyn Olcott, *Revolutionary Women in Postrevolutionary Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 16.

² Xavier Villaurrutia, *La poesía de los jóvenes de México* (Mexico City: Ediciones de la revista Antena, 1924), 5. Unless otherwise noted, translations are my own.

³ Kristin Pesola, “Antonieta Rivas Mercado: Power, Culture, and Sexuality in Post-revolutionary Mexico” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2001), 6.

⁴ There are numerous overlaps between the Ulises and Contemporáneos circles; as Edward J. Mullen notes, “During the activities of the Teatro de Ulises and the Teatro Orientación, the members of both theatrical groups were actively associated with Contemporáneos and the journal and the theater groups were mutually influential.” Edward J. Mullen, “A Study of ‘Contemporáneos: Revista mexicana de cultura’: 1928–1931” (PhD diss., Northwestern University, 1968), 153.

⁵ Pesola, “Antonieta Rivas Mercado,” 2.

⁶ Salvador Novo, “Como se fundó y que significa el Teatro de Ulises,” *El universal ilustrado*, May 17, 1928, 21, quoted and translated in Vicky Unruh, *Performing Women and Modern Literary Culture in Latin America: Intervening Acts* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 117.

⁷ Tayde Acosta Gamas, “Antonieta Rivas Mercado y su viaje por los grupos Ulises y Contemporáneos,” in *Los Contemporáneos y su tiempo*, eds. Miguel Fernández Félix and Arturo I. Saucedo González (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2016), 180.

⁸ Andrés Henestrosa, *María Antonieta Rivas Mercado* (Mexico City: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 1999), 10. Henestrosa’s verbiage reflects the competition among various cultural factions at this time to identify an ostensibly “real, definite meaning of Mexican culture;” his words should be understood as an attempt to legitimize the work of the Ulises group, whose aims diverged from this nationalist claim.

⁹ While Rivas Mercado’s divorce proceedings drew out until her death in 1931, it is clear that her intent was to legally divorce Blair and that she drew upon women’s expanded legal rights emerging from the Mexican Revolution. Stephanie Smith, “‘If Love Enslaves...Love Be Damned!’: Divorce and Revolutionary State Formation in Yucatán,” in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*, eds. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 103.

¹⁰ Carlos Monsiváis, “When Gender Can’t Be Seen amid the Symbols: Women and the Mexican Revolution,” in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*, eds. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 10.

¹¹ Prior to the reform of the civil code in 1927, men more frequently initiated divorce proceedings against their spouses for abandonment, testifying to the unlikelihood of women to pursue divorce as a way to exit from a marriage. The 1927 reform enabled women to participate in civil suits, take on the role of guardian, and devise legal contracts. See Smith, “If Love Enslaves,” 103–04; and Anna Macías, *Against All Odds: The Feminist Movement in Mexico to 1940* (Westport, CT.: Greenwood Press, 1982), 120.

¹² Andrés Henestrosa, *María Antonieta Rivas Mercado*, 8.

¹³ In 1924, amid a spree of abductions of pelonas, a group of women promised to cut their long hair for every subsequent incident, modeling an early form of feminist solidarity. See Anne Rubenstein, “The War on ‘Las Pelonas’: Modern Women and Their Enemies, Mexico City, 1924,” in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*, eds. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano, 57–80 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

¹⁴ “*Si se fundó el Teatro de Ulises en México fue porque yo quise.*” Manuel Rodríguez Lozano, *Pensamiento y pintura* (Mexico City: Imprenta Universitaria, 1960), 224. Rivas Mercado and Rodríguez Lozano were indeed active collaborators, including in the foundation of El Pirata, a modern dance salon.

¹⁵ “*La necesidad de hacer teatro, de tener teatro bueno, era apremiante.*” Quoted in Henestrosa, *María Antonieta Rivas Mercado*, 10.

¹⁶ Sergio Téllez-Pon, “Más Ulises que Contemporáneos,” in *Los Contemporáneos y su tiempo*, eds. Miguel Fernández Félix and Arturo I. Saucedo González (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, 2016), 164.

¹⁷ Frank Dauster, “The Contemporary Mexican Theater,” *Hispania* 38, no. 1 (March 1955): 31.

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- ¹⁸ Agustín Lazo, “Presencia de Villaurrutia,” *Revista de Guatemala* 1, no. 2 (April–June 1940), 190, quoted in Dauster, “The Contemporary Mexican Theater,” 31.
- ¹⁹ Henestrosa, *María Antonieta Rivas Mercado*, 12.
- ²⁰ Pesola, “Antonieta Rivas Mercado,” 51.
- ²¹ Edward J. Mullen, “The ‘Revista Contemporáneos’ and The Development of the Mexican Theater,” *Comparative Drama* 4, no. 4 (Winter 1970–1971): 280.
- ²² Pesola, “Antonieta Rivas Mercado,” 54–57.
- ²³ Adrian Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition: Women, Gender, and Representation in Mexican Art* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 16.
- ²⁴ Unruh, *Performing Women*, 129.
- ²⁵ “*la que vivió tan intensamente su papel, que pudo lograr en muchos momentos que se borrara la idea de la ficción.*” Jacobo Dalevuelta, “Cosas de actualidad, El Teatro de Ulises,” *El Universal*, February 12, 1928, 67, quoted in Pesola, “Antonieta Rivas Mercado,” 72.
- ²⁶ Unruh, *Performing Women*, 119.
- ²⁷ “...escogiendo cuidadosamente las obras, aprendiendo rigurosamente los papeles, estudiando la escenificación con esmero. En breve, no dejando nada al azar.” “Qué opinan los fomentadores del Teatro de Ulises de la crítica que les han hecho.” *El Universal*, May 30, 1928, 5, quoted in Pesola, “Antonieta Rivas Mercado,” 62.
- ²⁸ Antonieta Rivas Mercado, *Obras completas de María Antonieta Rivas Mercado*, ed. Luis Mario Schneider (Mexico City: Editorial Oasis and Secretaría de Educación Pública, 1987), 319.
- ²⁹ Zavala, *Becoming Modern*, 206.
- ³⁰ Robin Adèle Greeley, “Painting Mexican Identities: Nationalism and Gender in the Work of María Izquierdo,” *Oxford Art Journal* 23, no. 1 (2000): 55.
- ³¹ Zavala, *Becoming Modern*, 214.
- ³² María de Jesus González writes that, “Interviews conducted with Izquierdo’s children and friends suggest that her involvement with Los Contemporáneos was closer than the literature reveals.” González, “The Art of María Izquierdo,” 24–25.
- ³³ The only other women featured in the journal were the U.S. artists Wanda Gág and Peggy Bacon, who appeared in a section titled “Pintores Norteamericanos de Hoy” in *Contemporáneos* 7 (December 1928).
- ³⁴ Diego Rivera, “María Izquierdo,” *Mexican Life*, December 1929, 33.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*
- ³⁶ Greeley, “Painting Mexican Identities,” 55.
- ³⁷ Elizabeth Ferrer, *The True Poetry: The Art of María Izquierdo* (New York: Americas Society Art Gallery, 1997), 14.
- ³⁸ María de Jesus González, “The Art of María Izquierdo: Formative Years 1928 to 1934” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1998), 130.
- ³⁹ Lola Álvarez Bravo, *Lola Álvarez Bravo: Recuento fotográfico* (Mexico City: Editorial Penélope, 1982), 104.
- ⁴⁰ Octavio Paz reminisced that, when he first met Izquierdo, she “looked like a pre-Hispanic goddess. A face of sun-dried mud perfumed with copal incense. Highly made up, with cosmetics not at all up to date but age-old, ritual [. . .] When I saw her, I thought: the only thing missing is for her to suddenly bare fangs or take an obsidian knife from her brassiere and cut out [artist] Juan Soriano’s heart.” Even for Paz, Izquierdo’s staged self-image contained an implicit threat to traditional archetypes in the form of an imaginary dagger unveiled from her chest. Octavio Paz, “María Izquierdo: Seen in her Surroundings and Set in her Proper Place,” in *Essays on Mexican Art*, trans. Helen Lane (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1993), 249–50.
- ⁴¹ According to María de Jesus González and Lucelley Gallegos, Izquierdo “found a kindred spirit with these women and could relate her own life to that of a female circus performer.” María de Jesus González and Lucelley Gallegos, “María Izquierdo: Images of Women in the Circus,” in *The Many Worlds of Circus*, ed. Robert Sugarman (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 140.
- ⁴² The broadcast is known through a manuscript in Izquierdo’s archive, which bears the year “1934” in its upper-right corner. Many scholars revise this date to 1939, given the use of Izquierdo’s married name during her union with the Chilean painter Raúl Uribe. Nancy Deffebach argues that the broadcast was delivered in 1944 based on numerous sentiments in the text. See Nancy Deffebach, *María Izquierdo and Frida Kahlo: Challenging Visions in Modern Mexican Art* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015), 167.
- ⁴³ Linda Nochlin, “Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?” *ARTnews* (January 1971): 22–39, 67–71.
- ⁴⁴ Radio broadcast dictated by María Izquierdo, “La mujer y el arte mexicano,” July 1934, 1939, or 1944, copy of the transcription in the artist’s file at the Biblioteca de las Artes, El Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información de Artes Plásticas of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, quoted and translated in Deffebach, *María Izquierdo*, 168.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Celeste Donovan, “María Izquierdo: Religion, Gender, Mexicanidad, and Modern Art, 1940–1948” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2011), 65.

⁴⁷ María de Jesús González conducted a written interview with Izquierdo’s daughter, Aurora Posadas-Izquierdo, and concluded: “Although [Rivas Mercado] was a friend of Izquierdo, it is not clear to what extent Antonieta assisted Izquierdo, but they formed part of a sustaining, creative and intelligent environment by contributing their creative works to Mexican culture.” Similarly, Tayde Acosta Gamas does not count Izquierdo among Rivas Mercado’s acquaintances in an essay on the patron. Over the course of my research, I have not come across any photographic evidence of the two together. See González, “The Art of María Izquierdo,” 51; and Acosta Gamas, “Antonieta Rivas Mercado,” 178.

⁴⁸ Tristán Marof, *México de frente y de perfil* (Buenos Aires: Claridad, 1934), 127, quoted and translated in Salvador A. Oropesa, *The Contemporáneos Group: Rewriting Mexico in the Thirties and Forties* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003), 99.

⁴⁹ Zavala, *Becoming Modern*, 238.

⁵⁰ On this subject, see Tatiana Flores, “Strategic Modernists: Women Artists in Post-Revolutionary Mexico,” *Woman’s Art Journal* 29, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2008): 12–22.

⁵¹ Pesola cites the dubious publication of Rivas Mercado’s “suicide note” and “contradictions in tone, style, logic and historical facts” as evidence that discredits Rivas Mercado’s authorship of the text. Moreover, in his 1939 book *El Proconsulado*, Vasconcelos admitted that no suicide note existed. See Kristin Pesola, “Forgeries of a Failed Hero: Antonieta Rivas Mercado in the Hands of José Vasconcelos,” *Latin American Literary Review* 33, no. 66 (July–December 2005): 95–114.

⁵² Mary Kay Vaughan, “Pancho Villa, the Daughters of Mary, and the Modern Woman: Gender in the Long Mexican Revolution,” in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico*, eds. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 25.

⁵³ For a discussion of this so-called sale, see María Fernández, *Cosmopolitanism in Mexican Visual Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 214–15.