Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution. Rick A. López. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010. ISBN: 9780822346944

López's *Crafting Mexico* uses visual aesthetics and popular art as lenses through which to examine the attempts by Mexico's intellectuals to construct a unified "ethnicized" national culture out of the detritus of a revolution (1910–1920) in a country that had long been characterized by its many subnational cultures and that had, up until the revolution, tried to eliminate most non-European elements of those cultures. Although two of the book's chapters had already been published in other venues—an article in the *Hispanic American Historical Review* and a chapter in *The Eagle and the Virgin: National Identity, Memory and Utopia in Mexico, 1920–1940*—López's broader contextualization and conceptualization make this book a worthy purchase even for those who are familiar with his other work. Particularly unique and useful are the introduction of the concept of *ethnicization*—an expansion on previous scholars' use of Indianization—to explain Mexico's post-revolutionary cultural program, and López's placement of the reconstruction of Mexico's national identity of *mexicanidad* (or Mexicanness) in a transnational framework. Ethnicization—unlike Indianization—recognizes that post-revolutionary leaders not only wanted to infuse their national cultural project with selected aspects of Mexico's living indigenous cultures (even as they rejected other aspects of indigenous culture), but also that they "erased" Asian (mainly Chinese), Middle Eastern, and African elements. Prior to the Mexican Revolution, Mexican elites had adopted a modernizing program that, while promoting the aesthetic accomplishments of Mexico's indigenous ancestors, such as the monumental pyramids constructed by the Mayans and Aztecs, denigrated living indigenous people and sought to strip them of their culture. In fact, the federal government promoted European (and then Chinese) immigration as a means of assimilating indigenous people. When that failed (or had unintended consequences), the federal government engaged in a war of extermination against indigenous people unwilling to assimilate into mainstream Mexican culture or to open up their ancestral lands to "civilized" outside developers. Post-revolutionary elites rejected this approach, arguing that it would be impossible to convince the masses to assimilate into an elite-constructed national culture. Instead, they would extend national culture to include "the 'authentic'

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culture of the people" (7). One of the examples that López deftly uses, the India Bonita Contest staged by *El Universal* newspaper in 1921, demonstrates the limits of Mexico's cultural project. First, the beauty pageant was sponsored by a newspaper as a means of drumming up additional sales. The eventual winner, María Bibiana Uribe was only later incorporated into the state's official centennial program, demonstrating that state officials were more responding to changes in national culture than they were leading that change. In fact, López notes that at least up until 1938 the state was never the driving force behind the cultural product and, instead, responded to the initiatives of intellectuals and researchers. Second, in order to be "authentic", indigenous women needed to adopt a "natural" look, requiring them to change their everyday look to qualify; this natural state incorporated "outward markers of how an indigenous woman was supposed to look," including the wearing of "traditional" indigenous clothes, the absence of makeup, and hair worn in braids (37–8). Popular art also played a central role in the ethnicization of post-revolutionary Mexican culture. The promotion of the production and sale (both in Mexican cities and in the United States) of popular art served a dual purpose, weaving indigenous aesthetics into mainstream culture and serving as a means of rural economic development for the producing communities. Yet, this promotion of *mexicanidad* did not arise, as is often supposed, as a defense against cultural imperialism from the United States. López convincingly demonstrates that "authentic" post-revolutionary Mexican art, literature, and music was socially constructed in a transnational milieu of (mostly) elite Mexicans, Americans, and Europeans. A wave of mostly leftist "political tourists," writers, and artists migrated to Mexico during and after the revolution, setting the stage for the redefinition of *mexicanidad*. For example, famed writer Katherine Anne Porter helped to facilitate the first international exhibition of Mexican handicrafts in 1922. Although the handicrafts were eventually sold off, the catalogue that she created for the show helped to define Mexico as an indigenous country (in a positive sense) to an important sector of the United States. Even more important was Frances Toor, who produced the magazine *Mexican Folkways,* a popular culture magazine that reached a much broader audience than did Porter's catalogue. Historian Frank Tannenbaum, art historian Anita Brenner, writer Ernest Gruening, photographer Edward Weston, businessman Frederick Davis, and U.S.

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ambassador Dwight Morrow, among others, also worked closely with Mexican elites to promote Mexican popular culture. López argues that it was the unequal relationship between Mexican and U.S. elites that resulted in the erasure of the transnational social construction of post-revolutionary *mexicanidad*. Mexican leaders at both the Education Ministry (SEP) and the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) began to rewrite Mexico's promotion of *indigenismo* (Indianism) without foreign collaboration in the mid-to-late 1930s, just as the federal government was officially adopting *indigenismo* as its own, and, it is worth noting, just as the federal government was consolidating its power.

The second half of the book, which I will touch on only briefly, is a microhistory of Olinalá, Guerrero. It explores how the changes covered in the first half of the book impacted a community of artists as they and their artistic approaches were integrated and integrated themselves into the national concept of *mexicanidad.* López uses Olinalá as an example because, due to its supposed isolation from possibly corrupting outside influences, it popular crafts were viewed as "more Mexican than Mexico." It is in this part of the book that López moves beyond an elite understanding of *mexicanidad* by taking into account the local knowledge and beliefs of an actual artisan community. López traces the community as far back as the Aztec empire, noting that Olinalá's artists had long used their art to "mediate empire, region, nation, and ethnicity" (200). Interestingly, while Olinalá had long been an artisan community and had long been intimately connected with central Mexico, by the late nineteenth century, the majority of locals had been forced out of the artisan business and into debt peonage, and the community had been more or less cut off from contact with Mexico City. In fact, it was an attack by the followers of famed revolutionary Emiliano Zapata in 1913 that spurred starving townsfolk to rely once again on lacquer ware and reconnected it with the rest of the country. By examining Olinalá, López is able to provide us with an alternative historical account of the rise of the rise of post-revolutionary *mexicanidad*. While elites in Mexico City trace the rebirth of lacquer ware in Olinalá to 1927, when their artists' work was rediscovered by René d'Harnoncourt, an art curator and purchasing agent for Frederick Davis, Olinatlecos (as they call themselves) date that rebirth to 1913 when they took it upon themselves to reinvigorate their artisanal past. Neither explanation is incorrect. The reality was that Mexico City elites and Olinatlecos

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negotiated Olinalá's artistic production so that local lacquer ware met newly emerging ideals of an ethnicized Mexico. In the process, it changed both Mexico and Olinatlecos.

López has done us a great service by both complicating our understanding of the elite social construction of an ethnic Mexico in a transnational milieu and the negotiations that elites engaged in with everyday people. I suspect that his concept of *ethnicization* can be used by historians to examine elite cultural projects in other countries and other regions of the world, and his focus on the construction of national culture in a transnational milieu will do much in pushing us beyond the revisionist stories that nationalist elites would have us take at face value. Nonetheless, López overstates his case for the creation of a "mass-based and inclusive identity that most Mexicans and foreigners today take for granted" (14). Mexico is still a land of many Mexicos, from the jungles of Chiapas where the Zapatistas have pushed for semi-autonomy for nearly two decades, to the country's north where generations of Mexicans have often been as closely tied to U.S. as Mexican culture, to the country's west where the colorfully clothed *charro* and mariachi music also claim acceptance as national cultural symbols. It will be up to future historians to continue the work begun by López to further explore the successes and limitations of Mexico's post-revolutionary cultural program.

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