

GERMÁN LIST

ARZUBIDE
(1898-1998)

EN LAS LETRAS ESTÁ LA VIDA



The Ministry of Culture of the Government of Mexico and the National Institute of Fine Arts and Literature (INBAL), through the National Museum of Art (MUNAL), present the exhibition ***Germán List Arzubide (1898-1998) Life is in letters***. The curatorship, articulated in four large cores: *A Revolutionary is Born, Stridentism, Puppet Theater and Radio* and *A Century of Opposition*, is made up of more than 300 pieces, in which the writer and his work are rediscovered, thanks to a meticulous study of the personal archive that today allows us to travel along the little-traveled path of letters in Mexico.

Germán List's work is universal, avant-garde and timeless; His disruptive speech has transcended to the present day due to its impact on the cultural, ideological, social and pedagogical development of our country. Throughout his career, this multifaceted actor was honored on multiple occasions; among them, with the National Prize for Journalism and Information (1982), the Fine Arts Medal (1997) and, finally, the National Prize for Sciences and the Arts.

The work he developed in one hundred years of life is endless, and the richness of his inheritance is immense. This selection is just a representative sample of the maestro's vast work as a journalist, diplomat, cultural promoter and activist, to which he adds his innovative work in broadcasting and radio. The exhibition is enriched with the artistic work of Diego Rivera, Aurora Reyes, Ezequiel Negrete Lira, Juan Leonardo Cordero, Francisco Arturo Marín, Luis Arenal, Isaías Cervantes, Enrique Gottdiener, Ramón Alva de la Canal, among other creators.

The curatorial team, led by Estela Duarte, was always accompanied by the List-Crespo family, particularly Addy Crespo Weber and Robin List Crespo, who have worked since 2019 on exciting research work.

Photographs, documents and recognitions give a brief review of Germán's professional and family life, from his childhood in his native Puebla, to the tributes made and recognitions received in the last years of his life. In this core, the series of portraits taken by her friend, the Italian photographer Tina Modotti, stands out, who managed to capture the essence of her multifaceted personality.

Considered one of the first literary and artistic avant-garde of the second decade of the 20th century in Mexico and Latin America, this movement influenced artistic creation in multiple disciplines. Publications such as *El Café de Nadie* by Arqueles Vela; *Urbe* by Manuel Maples Arce and *El Movimiento Estridentista* by List himself, are testimony to the concerns and intellectual proposals that emanated from the so-called "Mexican Athens." Also, on

display are copies of the magazines *Irradiador* and *Horizonte*, organs of ideological dissemination of the Estridentista movement, the latter directed by Germán, with a circulation of 10 issues and multiple supplements. In art, the work *El Café de Nadie* stands out, made around 1930 by Ramón Alva de la Canal, which is considered the emblematic painting of this avant-garde; The original version of the canvas was destroyed, fortunately, the second oil painting was donated to the National Museum of Art by the Maples Arce family in 1992.

The influence of Estridentismo on the thought of the second decade of the 20th century is evident in literary editions of various kinds, proliferating in the state of Veracruz, Puebla and, of course, Mexico City. An example of this is some of the editions of the magazines *Noviembre*, *Norte*, *Crisol*, *Simiente* and *Masses*. An essential complement was the plastic arts in the illustration of books and periodicals, in which creators such as Leopoldo Méndez, Ramón Alva de la Canal, Fermín Revueltas, Germán Cueto and Julio Prieto participated, to list a few.

The literature of List and the plastic artists contributed to the development of puppet theater and radio in Mexico. In this section, painting, sculpture and printed publications dialogue with puppets and textile marionettes, whose production and handling for staging was carried out by renowned artists, such as Lola and Germán Cueto, the brothers Loló and Ramón Alva de la Canal, Angelina Beloff and Jaime Colson.

The concept of puppet theater was forged in List's experiences in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and from conversations held in Paris with Beloff and the Cueto couple. The scripts proposed for childhood are part of the socialist education that prevailed at the time. Comino defeats the Devil deserves special mention, whose protagonist was the favorite character of the children of that time, who, in addition, was part of the inauguration of the glove theater; His adventures always offer laughter, wit, morals, reflections and lessons.

His contribution to radio was extremely important for the transformation and development of new concepts of social communication; Troka stands out in this area, the powerful character developed by List who taught children not to fear new technologies and the progress of the time. He also wrote, for this medium, approximately 80 historical narratives, ranging from the pre-Hispanic myth of Quetzalcóatl to the Mexican Revolution, which were broadcast on XFX, a frequency dependent on the Ministry of Public Education.

In 1932, List presented, for the first time, *Comino conquers the devil* in the Cueto house, with the presence of Narciso Bassols and a group of children, who with joy and interest confirmed the relevance of the Guiñol Theater within the recent Cultural Missions, which aimed to teach literacy, teach basic notions of hygiene and promote a love of work.

The following year, the Department of Fine Arts took the reins of the project, organizing the two main companies, Comino and Rin-Rin. The first,

coordinated by the brothers Dolores (Loló) and Ramón Alva de la Canal, and the second, by Lola and Germán Cueto. Multiple intellectuals, artisans and artists of great renown worked for more than four decades in the so-called “Golden Age of the Guiñol Theater.”

The MUNAL brings together, in an unprecedented way, a total of 16 dramaturgies and 39 pieces from INBAL’s own funds, highlighting *Comino wash your teeth* and *Viaje a la Luna* by Germán List; classic works such as *Pedro and the Wolf*, or *The Walking Tadpole*; *Firuleque the sweet tooth*, *Ventripod’s war*, *Botón de Oro* and *The winter of the animals*, to name a few.

The success of the glove puppets lay in the proximity of the puppeteers to the most vulnerable populations, with a close and didactic language. It is also worth mentioning his great propaganda work, in a Mexico eager for cultural and social programs that would support the cohesion of a post-revolutionary society.

It is almost impossible to recount the vastness of his legacy as an activist. This section is just a wide angle of the multiple tasks as a social fighter, diplomat, educator, journalist and historian; his interests reveal the exacerbated revolutionary spirit, sown in childhood when he witnessed, from the family roof in Puebla, the armed uprising of the Serdán brothers, thus forging a rebellious temper that greatly influenced him.

Germán’s life was full of trips and anecdotes that reflect his restless and subversive spirit, from his support for the revolutionary movement, to his

militancy in the League of Revolutionary Writers and Artists and in the Mexican Communist Party, adopting Lenin's postulates; His relationship with such emblematic foreign figures as Vladimir Mayakovsky and Augusto César Sandino stands out; the first, a poet and promoter of the Russian Revolution, and the second, leader of the revolution against the American occupation in Nicaragua. These characters shared both political and creative affinities, and were combative defenders of great social injustices, maintaining their convictions and ideals.

List traveled to conferences, summits and international dialogue tables. He was a spokesperson for Latin America in the search for social ideals, justice and demands for human rights and, later, ambassador; During his stay in Russia and Eastern Europe, he acquired valuable learning that he applied to various didactic and educational tools, which inspired him to author literary works of historical, socialist, criticism and denunciation, with the firm intention of building a society. more awake and liberal. In addition, the teacher promoted letters as a journalist, director and editor of countless magazines and newspapers, such as *Tiempo*, *Excelsior*, *El Nacional* and *Congreso*.

