



# How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State

*Mary K. Coffey*

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A public art movement initiated by the postrevolutionary state, Mexican muralism has long been admired for its depictions of popular struggle and social justice. Mary K. Coffey revises traditional accounts of Mexican muralism by describing how a radical art movement was transformed into official culture, ultimately becoming a tool of state propaganda. Analyzing the incorporation of mural art into Mexico's most important public museums—the Palace of Fine Arts, the National History Museum, and the National Anthropology Museum—Coffey illuminates the institutionalization of muralism and the political and aesthetic issues it raised. She focuses on the period between 1934, when José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera were commissioned to create murals in the Palace of Fine Arts, through the crisis of state authority in the 1960s. Coffey highlights a reciprocal relationship between Mexico's mural art and its museums. Muralism shaped exhibition practices, which affected the politics, aesthetics, and reception of mural art. Interpreting the iconography of Mexico's murals, she focuses on representations of mestizo identity, the preeminent symbol of postrevolutionary Mexico. Coffey argues that those gendered representations reveal a national culture project more invested in race and gender inequality than in race and class equality.

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