



Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity

By John Mraz

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In *Looking for Mexico*, a leading historian of visual culture, John Mraz, provides a panoramic view of Mexico's modern visual culture from the U.S. invasion of 1847 to the present. Along the way, he illuminates the powerful role of photographs, films, illustrated magazines, and image-filled history books in the construction of national identity, showing how Mexicans have both made themselves and been made with the webs of significance spun by modern media. Central to Mraz's book is photography, which was distributed widely throughout Mexico in the form of *cartes-de-visite*, postcards, and illustrated magazines. Mraz analyzes the work of a broad range of photographers, including Guillermo Kahlo, Winfield Scott, Hugo Brehme, Agustín Víctor Casasola, Tina Modotti, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Héctor García, Pedro Meyer, and the New Photojournalists. He also examines representations of Mexico's past in the country's influential picture histories: popular, large-format, multivolume series replete with thousands of photographs and an assortment of texts.

Turning to film, Mraz compares portrayals of the Mexican Revolution by Fernando de Fuentes to the later movies of Emilio Fernández and Gabriel Figueroa. He considers major stars of Golden Age cinema as gender archetypes for *mexicanidad*, juxtaposing the *charros* (hacienda cowboys) embodied by Pedro Infante, Pedro Armendáriz, and Jorge Negrete with the effacing women: the mother, Indian, and shrew as played by Sara García, Dolores del Río, and María Félix. Mraz also analyzes the leading comedians of the Mexican screen, representations of the 1968 student revolt, and depictions of Frida Kahlo in films made by Paul Leduc and Julie Taymor. Filled with more than fifty illustrations, *Looking for Mexico* is an exuberant plunge into Mexico's national identity, its visual culture, and the connections between the two.

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Looking for Mexico: Modern Visual Culture and National Identity By John Mraz Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #1519563 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Duke University Press Books
- Published on: 2009-06-15
- Released on: 2009-06-15
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x .90" w x 6.13" l, 1.15 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 360 pages

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Editorial Review

Review

“Mraz’s book constitutes a significant step in our understanding of Mexican photography in the twentieth-century Mexican landscape. The sections on contemporary photographers, from Hector Garcia to Pedro Meyer and from Manuel Alvarez Bravo to the rise of photojournalism in Mexico, are particularly noteworthy.” - Juan Javier Pescador, *Hispanic American Historical Review*

“To paraphrase Octavio Paz, Mexican identity is constructed of distinct races and languages, as well as of various levels of history. Mraz’s thoughtful treatment of this profound idea benefits scholars, students, and other interested readers with its near comprehensive, but necessarily abbreviated, coverage of a rich and colorful topic.” - Charles Heath, *H-Net Reviews*

“*Looking for Mexico* represents a significant advance in the fields of visual culture and Mexican history that should be read by all those interested in the construction of national identities in Latin America and beyond. . . . Accessible, engaging, and innovative, *Looking for Mexico* will surely find a well-deserved place on many undergraduate and graduate course outlines and become a standard work on the topic.”
- Amelia M. Kiddle, *The Latin Americanist*

“Mraz not only displays an encyclopedic knowledge of Mexican photography; he also proposes extremely original, insightful, and creative ways of organizing and making sense of this vast archive. . . . *Looking for Mexico* is brilliantly researched, passionately argued, and beautifully written. It will become the definitive history of Mexican photography. No other available book is as broad and as informed.” - Rubén Gallo, *Hispanic Review*

“Mraz’s ambitious study remains of great value in providing an overview that enables the reader to make connections across a vast terrain of photographic and cinematic practice, and will no doubt inspire further investigation into the still underdeveloped field of Latin American visual studies.” - Pippa Oldfield, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*

“[T]he scope, accessibility, and argument of this important book make it a great choice for use in a course on visual culture, or a more general course on modern Mexico.” - John Lear, *The Americas*

"John Mraz contributes new insights to a growing body of literature that examines the role of photography and film within the "renaissance" that emerged in the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution of 1910.... [T]he book is written in an easily accessible and engaging style.... Looking for Mexico brings together a provocative array of images and image-makers." - Adriana Zavala, *Visual Resources*

“No one is better qualified to present and analyze Mexico’s vast visual archive than John Mraz, and he does so with great finesse. Drawing a broad arch from the daguerreotype to digitalization, he successfully links the past to the present in ways that only one as knowledgeable as he could accomplish.”—**Eric Zolov**, author of *Refried Elvis: The Rise of Mexican Counterculture*

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About the Author

John Mraz is a Research Professor with the Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades at Benemerita Universidad Autonoma de Puebla, Mexico. He is the author of *Nacho Lopez, Mexican Photographer* and *La Mirada Inquieta: Nuevo fotoperiodismo mexicano, 1976–1996* and a co-author of *Uprooted: Braceros in the Hermanos Mayo Lens*.

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