Contributor: June Koehler Black

**DR. ATL (Gerardo Murillo)**

**Born: 1875, Mexico; Died: 1964, Mexico**

Dr. Atl was a Mexican artist, author, political activist, and amateur volcanologist. Born Gerardo Murillo in 1875 and raised in Guadalajara in the state of Jalisco, Dr. Atl was trained in drawing and the use of colour by the Brazilian-born artist Félix Bernardelli, from whom he also learned of the European vanguard. When Murillo received a scholarship from the Mexican Ministry of Public Education and Fine Arts in 1897, he travelled first to France, where he encountered the work of the Impressionists and Post-Impressionists. He then travelled to Italy, where he learned of the Divisionists, a group whose technical innovations in painting motivated his own later reimagining of the medium’s possibilities. From 1911-1914, the artist lived and worked in Paris. Throughout the early 1900s, Dr. Alt stayed connected to the arts scene in Europe, although he rejected what he referred to as the barbarity of Futurism and Cubism. Upon returning to his home country in 1914, Dr. Alt revolutionised the Mexican approach to depicting landscapes. Building on Mexico’s already strong tradition of landscape painting—most notably the work of Luis Coto, Daniel Thomas Egerton, Eugenio Landesio, and José María Velasco—he introduced Mexican society to the techniques he had learned in Europe and brought a new expressiveness to the genre.

During his stay in Paris in the early 1910s, Gerardo Murillo adopted the name Dr. Atl in a baptism ceremony wherein he was immersed in champagne rather than water. The Nicaraguan poet Rubén Darío and Argentinian writer Leopoldo Lugones served as godparents. An important painter in Mexico and internationally, in his paintings, the artist avoided direct copying of the natural world, rather seeking to depict the sensory experience of being in it—one that he described as violently overwhelming. This overpowering sensation is conveyed in his paintings with the use of curvilinear perspective, or a forced curving of the horizon line that produces a wrapping sensation.

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*El Popo desde Tlamacas (Popo from Tlamacas)*

1942

Oil and Atl color on masonite

Collection of the National Bank of Mexico

Blaisten, A. ed. (2012) *Dr. Atl: Obras Maestras/Masterpieces*, Madrid: Turner.

The work was found in Blaisten, A. ed. (2012) *Dr. Atl: Obras Maestras/Masterpieces*, Madrid: Turner.

The connection he saw between the land, politics, and art was such that he envisioned the creation of several utopian colonies, the most famous of which was known as Olinka. Although none of these came to fruition, his plans for them figure strongly in his artistic output. He is best remembered professionally for his use of curvilinear perspective, a concept first developed by Luis G. Serrano, and his invention of a new type of pigment, which he called Atl colors. He is also famous for his brief affair with Carmen Mondragón, known as Nahui Olin, whom he painted often during the early to mid-1920s.

Dr. Atl produced quick black and white sketches in the field and completed his paintings from memory, with the aid of notes. The finishing touch on his works was generally the application of Atl color, which produced a pointillist effect. He wanted to combine the convenience of pastels with the vibrancy and durability of encaustic; thus, around 1915, the artist invented bars of pigment, wax, and dry resins that functioned in a manner similar to encaustic, but could be applied cold. Dr. Atl continued painting, writing (both about art and politics), and studying volcanoes until the end of his life in 1963.

References and further reading:

Blaisten, A. ed. (2012) *Dr. Atl: Obras Maestras/Masterpieces*, Madrid: Turner.

Casado Navarro, A. (1984) *Gerardo Murillo: El Dr. Atl*, Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

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LIST OF WORKS:

*Autorretrato (Self-Portrait)*

1899

Pastel pastel on paper

Private Collection

*Cola de caballo (Horsetail Fall)*

c. 1928

Aqua-resin on jute

Colección Museuo Nacional de Arte, INBA

*Nahui Olin*

c. 1922

Atl color on fresco

Andrés Blaisten Collection

*El Paricutín y sus lomas de arena (Paricutín and Its Sandy Areas)*

c. 1950

Oil and Atl color on masonite

Collection of the National Bank of Mexico

*Volcán con fumarola (Volcano with Fumarole)*

1960

Oil on masonite

Private Collection

*El Valle de Pihuamo (Valley of Pihuamo)*

c. 1952

Oil and Atl color on canvas

Private Collection

*Pico de Orizaba (Orizaba Peak)*

1960

Oil and Atl color on wood

Private Collection