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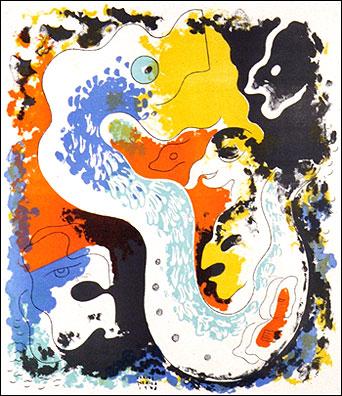
**Mérida, Carlos**

Born: 1891 – Guatemala City, Guatemala; Died: 1984 – Mexico City, Mexico

Carlos Mérida was a key non-figurative painter in Latin America. His contemporaries identified him as a pioneer in this regard and his work was often described as ultra-modern. During his career he worked primarily in three styles, figurative from 1907-1926, surrealist from the 1920s-1940s, and geometric from the 1940s until his death in 1984. Despite the different styles, indigenous themes featured prominently throughout his career. An incredibly prolific artist, Mérida produced over 2,500 works during his life, in such diverse media as painting (canvas and murals), drawings, lithography, sets for ballets, and illustrated books. His career can also be divided into the abstract, *avant garde* work he exhibited at galleries and museums world-wide, and the more figurative, narrative projects that furthered his interest in indigenous themes. Mérida’s diverse work is characterized by an interest in form and color. Even during his more figurative era, Mérida depicted his subjects with a simplified, geometric forms and bright, saturated hues. In portraying the human form, this simplification is taken to near abstraction, often with a mere curve outlining the face, no articulation of the hands or feet, or a sinuous line defining the body, arms and legs. Flat blocks of color build his compositions, creating a plane that avoids linear perspective.

Carlos Mérida was born in Guatemala in 1891, he was of Maya ancestry on his paternal side, while his maternal ancestors were Spanish bureaucrats in Guatemala City. He spent large portions of his childhood living in a small town outside of Guatemala City where he was exposed to indigenous influences. His early education featured drawing, painting and music lessons, the later of which were terminated upon a damaging ear infection in his late adolescence. In 1910 he traveled to Europe, spending most of his time in Paris, becoming friends with **Pablo Picasso** and **Amedeo Modiglian**i as well as other Latin American artists immersing themselves in modern artistic movements, such as **Diego Riviera** and **Dr. Atl**. Perhaps most important in his career development was his trip to Mexico in 1919, during which he reunited with friends made during his European travels and became entrenched in the modern Mexican art and intellectual movements. He exhibited at the Mexican National Academy of Fine Arts in 1920, and joined the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors in 1921. Upon Mérida’s return from Europe he became interested in depicting the folk cultural elements of Guatemalan culture that he had experienced as a child. It was, in fact, this interest in merging indigenous themes with modern art styles that initially bound him to the group of modern artists in Mexico City.

In 1939 Mérida collaborated with Carlos Orozco Romero, another painter, to create la Escuela de la Danza de la Secretaría de Educación Publica de México, continuing his early interests in music and folk culture. The influences of dance and music are often incorporated in his two-dimensional works by the repetition of geometric shapes that give his compositions a sense of rhythm. In the late 1950s, Mérida received international recognition including the Order of the Quetzal (1958) and Order of the Aztec Eagle (1980) by the Guatemalan and Mexican governments respectively. The Museum of Modern Art in Guatemala was dedicated to Mérida upon its inception in 1975. Carlos Mérida died in Mexico City in 1984. Since his death, retrospectives of his work have been organized in Guatemala, Mexico, and the United States.



Carlos Mérida, Plate I, *The Popol Vuh*, 1941, lithograph, 16 ¾ x 12 ¾ inches, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University.

**Further Reading:**

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