

THE HUMAN BODY AS ART

Figurative Images in “Mundos de Mestizaje”

by Frederico Vigil

Located in the Torreón on the campus of the National Hispanic Cultural Center, the buon fresco, *Mundos de Mestizaje*, by Frederico Vigil, depicts thousands of years of Hispanic/Latinx history, highlighting diverse cultural connections between people and places from all over the world.

Before visiting, it is important to know that this monumental work includes the human body as art. All of the people represented are a part of the fresco’s complex visual narrative, and depictions of their bodies are a feature, but not the sole focus, of the artwork.

The purpose of this document is to provide context for some of the figurative images depicted in the fresco. The following guidelines, along with digital resources, were developed to address a wide range of perspectives about the human body in art. As such, the digitally accessible 360° experience of the fresco is available in either the original or a modified version.



The Northwest Wall of Mundos de Mestizaje

“Throughout time, artists, sculptors and craftsmen have depicted the human body in celebration of beliefs, philosophies, life, and death. Artists are concerned with exploring truth and therefore show the body in its natural appearance.”

--The National Docent Symposium Council.

There are over 220 images in *Mundos de Mestizaje* whose depictions are just as complex and historically intertwined as the work’s title implies. The imagery evokes different themes that date back from the creation of humanity to today’s modern society. Some images are historical, and refer to specific people, documents, books, religious figures, or technological advancements. Other images represent concepts or more abstract ideas. Over a dozen languages are represented, including English, Spanish, Cuneiform, Phoenician, Mayan, Incan,

Arabic, Hebrew, and the native languages of various Pueblos in New Mexico. All of the people represented are a part of the fresco's patchwork narrative.

Figurative Images and their Locations in the Fresco

Walls



The vertical, concave walls evoke people, places and things and their contributions to present-day Hispanic culture. These elements of civilizations have come into contact with, mixed, and influenced each other.

Despite being a work on one continuous, concave wall, the painted columns can be seen to separate the fresco into four sections. The columns align with the cardinal directions and can be an organizing point for you or your students when speaking about the many images in the fresco.

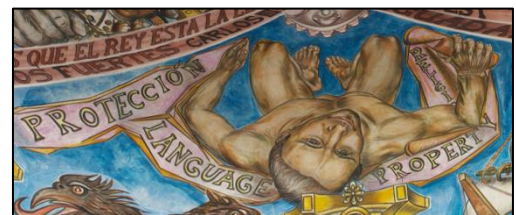
On the **Southwest Wall**, there is a child who faces you, the viewer. This child is a part of the image “compadrazgo,” relating to the tradition of godparents, or ritual co-parenthood, in the Catholic religion. The boy is looking up toward a cherub-figure above and to your left.

Below this image are two men with lumber in their arms suggesting the rebuilding of colonial Spanish settlements after the Pueblo Revolt. You may notice how large the man's hand appears. There are many other images within the fresco where hands, sometimes objects, seem to advance toward the viewer.



On the **Northwest Wall**, there is a depiction of a jadeite (greenstone) figurine dating to the Olmec civilization in Mesoamerica. Its back side faces you, the viewer. Similar figurines were found buried together at the ruins of La Venta in Tabasco, Mexico. This is the only lifelike image which is not facing the viewer.

Near the top of the **Northeast Wall**, there is an adult figure depicted upside down with a banner reading “Protección, Language, Property, Religion,” referencing the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo. The position of the man's body is reminiscent of the way an infant emerges from the birth canal. You may see



other figures in a similar position, and more images that reference motherhood, elsewhere in the fresco.

Ceiling

With the cylindrical structure of the Torreón, your eyes will be drawn towards the ceiling. The ceiling was meant to show things we strive for—disciplines that are important to all civilizations. The artist includes a variety of figures within the themes of *Justicia, Fé, Arquitectura, Militar, Paz, Ciencia, Música, Esperanza, Medicina, Sagrada Tierra, Amor, and Educación.*



In the image of *Sagrada Tierra*, mother earth is shown touching hands with the neighboring depiction of *Amor*. The words, connected by “y” (“and”), suggest that loving the earth can be equated with loving one another as human beings.



The ceiling also features four adult figures who raise infants toward the cupola, or the skylight above the ceiling. Two examples are shown at left. The adults hold the infants skyward toward the image of the Creator’s hand sparking fire. The artist, Frederico Vigil, talks about these images in terms of his Catholic upbringing and his belief that God’s gift to humankind are children.

“MUNDOS DE MESTIZAJE” AND CURRICULUM ALIGNMENT

You may want to view the fresco in person or online prior to planning a field trip, discuss the benefits and challenges of bringing students to visit this artwork with school administration, and share with your own experience of the human body as art in “Mundos de Mestizaje.”

Discussion Questions

When viewing the fresco, in either its original or modified version, we have gathered the following discussion points to keep students thinking critically about the figures in relation to the artwork:

- Why do you think the artist included these images?
- What is the difference between seeing a clothed body and an unclothed body, in a work of art?
- How does clothing change our perception of ourselves, others?

- How do these images of the human body relate to the title of the fresco, “Mundos de Mestizaje?” What is the connection?

Communicating with Parents

“The Human Body as Art in *Mundos de Mestizaje*” is a condensed version of this document that you may share with parents, guardians, or your school administration. These documents are intentionally crafted to address the content of the fresco with sensitivity. If parents have questions, you now have more information to elaborate on the fresco’s content, as a whole.

Further Reading

Here are additional tips from other museum institutions on how to approach The Human Body as Art with students:

The Art Institute of Chicago:

<https://www.artic.edu/collection/resources/educator-resources/63-tips-for-teachers-and-parents-body-language-how-to-talk-to-students-about-nudity-in-art>

Museum of Art and Archaeology at the University of Missouri:

https://maa.missouri.edu/sites/default/files/education/addressing_nudity_in_art_09.pdf

The Art of Education University:

<https://theartofeducation.edu/2016/04/19/april-naked-vs-nude-discussion/>

The Utah Museum of Fine Arts:

<https://umfa.utah.edu/sites/default/files/2017-10/Teaching-the-Nude-in-Art.pdf>

