- PAPIER MACHE-

AN EXPLORATION OF MEXICAN DAY OF THE DEAD PAPIER MACHE AND

ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE CURRENT REVIVAL

BY

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INTRODUCTION

The idea for this thesis began with a desire to investigate the current papier mache revival. The contemporary work, art and craft, to be found in the medium is simply inspiring. There is great competition among the papier mache artists to create forms unlike any that have been made before. To those sensitive to its qualities it has almost magical properties. These can be echoed in the words of Theodorai Fandousi, 'Everything I have learned about the medium disappears from consciousness and my actions are led by instinct'. (1,p.64)

Deborah Schneebeli–Morrell is one such artist, whose work has intrigued me. The 'naive' style, pure colour and timelessness of her work is reminiscent of traditional folk art imagery. Not only do I admire the craft and skill involved in the construction of her papier mache forms, but also the thought processes behind them. It was a natural progression to research some of the ideas and influences behind her work. Through this, I learned that Schneebeli–Morrell is directly influenced by Mexican folk art papier mache.

Prior to the research of this thesis I was not even familiar with the incredible popularity of papier mache as household wares and furniture during the Georgian and Victorian periods. Since we can

learn from history and adapt past styles and methods to modern uses, it is necessary then, to begin by putting the subject into a historical context. Chapter one touches on some of the key themes and moments during the mediums ancient history.

The second chapter will give a flavour of the extraordinary folk art papier mache to be found in Mexico and explain the main ideas behind the well established folk tradition. The reader is introduced to the 'The Day of the Dead', which is one of Mexico's most important festivals. It is a time of celebration, not mourning, which inspires a creative and vivid explosion of papier mache artefects among its craftspeople.

The 'Popular Art' papier mache work of Mexico, influenced by the engraved political and satirical 'Calaveras' of Jose Guadalupe Posada, is discussed in chapter three. Posada is one of the rare artists whose work, though topical and spontaneously executed, has as much power today as it had on the Mexican working class audience, for which it was originally produced.

Last November, the Museum of Mankind launched a new Day of the Dead exhibition, entitled 'The Skeleton at the Feast'. I had the good fortune to gain the opportunity to visit this wonderful exhibition. The visit proved truly valuable, providing much of the

information and ideas for chapters two and three.

The international contemporary papier mache revival of today, without a doubt, directly and indirectly has been greatly influenced by the traditional folk and Popular Art work of Mexico. However, this is not the only contributory factor. The reasons why I believe the revival has come about are discussed in chapter four. I felt it was necessary to do this, as there is very little written material on the subject and I particularly wanted to find out why the recent resurgence of interest in papier mache has evolved. I felt it could not be solely pinned down as the mediums turn to be fashionable or to be enjoyed as a novelty, as it had been in Western Europe during the 18th and 19th centuries.

I support these ideas with the help of the work of Deborah Schneebeli-Morrell. After all, she had introduced me to Mexican papier mache and was one of the first artists to begin working seriously with the medium in the 80's, making her one of the founders of the revival. Her work and ideas are aptly illustrated briefly in the final chapter.

CHAPTER ONE

A UNIVERSAL MEDIUM

Some of the past most ingenious inventions and creations have been carried out by the inspiring craftspeople of the Georgian and Victorian periods working in papier mache, these people truly understood the potential and versatility of the medium.

An extraordinary demonstration of the versatility of this wonderful medium was a watch made in Dresden, Germany in 1883, constructed entirely of papier mache and paper. It was durable and performed as well as any metal watch. (1,p.11)

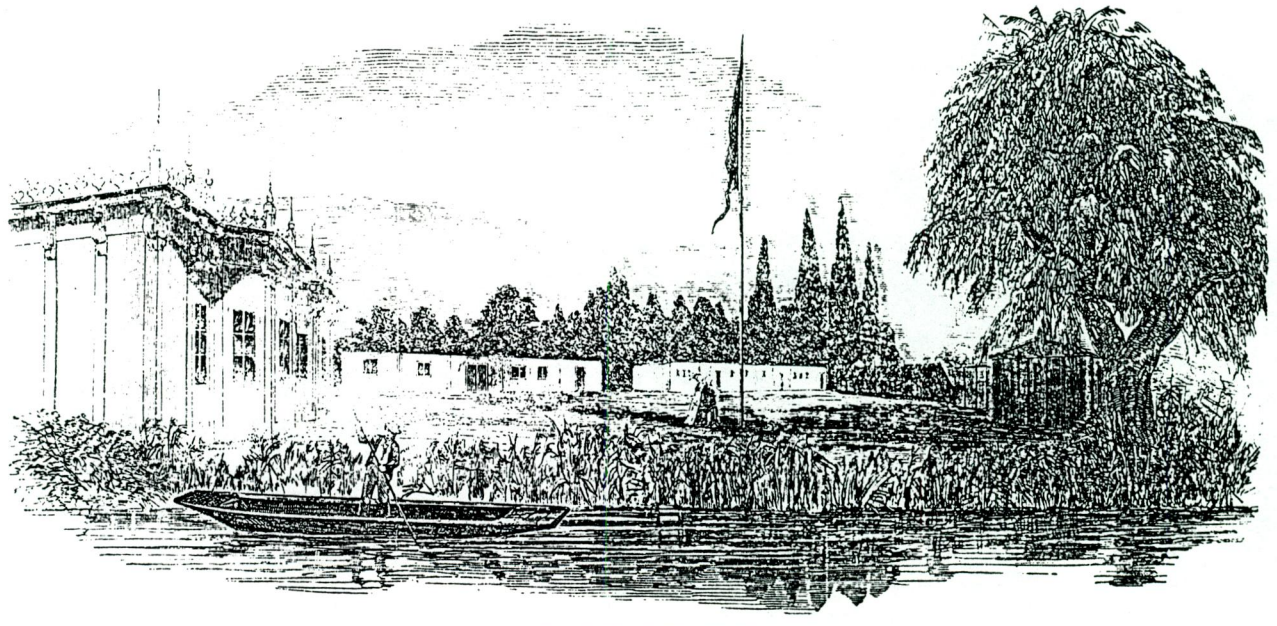
The first man in England to use the new invention, around 1730, was John Baskerville, renowned for his fine books and typefounding. He decided to use panels of papier mache instead of wooden panels in building a coach for himself. The medium was ideal because it was light yet resilient, strong and waterproof and could be moulded into the shape he wanted, whereas wood had to be carved and bent. (20,p.9)

Papier mache was initially slow to take off in the west, however, later on one will see that papier mache was used to create an enormous range of objects and artefacts. This should be attributed to the clever eccentricity of great men like Issac Weld, an Irishman from Cork, who in 1800 made a boat of papier mache and sailed it on the lakes of Killarney. In 1883 Charles Frederick Bielefeld designed and built ten prefabricated

cottages and a ten roomed villa for transportation to Australia, for a Mr. Seymour and his party to inhabit on arrival. It took only four hours to assemble. When the village was temporarily set up on the factory grounds, heavy rains caused flooding and the houses stood two feet deep in water without drainage. (Fig:1)(5,p.31) The fate of the village is unknown, but it is thought that some of the homes may have survived for quite some time. Certainly a papier mache church erected near Bergen, Norway in 1793 lasted 37 years before being demolished. (1,p.13)

The manufacture of papier mache goods grew rapidly in confidence and dexterity through the 18th century. It was the English who discovered the exceptional suitability of the medium for the making of architectural and decorative mouldings, such as small guilded wall brackets, sconces and small boxes. These items weighed only a fraction of their plaster and stucco counterparts. At the time George Washington was interested in acquiring English papier mache mouldings for the ceilings of two rooms at Mount Vernon. (5,p.15)

In 1788 a Frenchman in admiration of this English product wrote 'The English cast in cardboard the ceiling ornaments that we make in plaster. They are more durable, break off with difficulty, or if they do break off, the danger is of no account and the repair less expensive.'
(5,p.30)



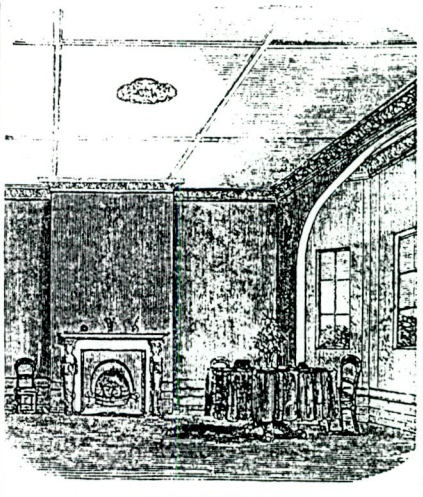
PAPIER-MACHE VILLAGE FOR AUSTRALIA.

A PAPIER-MACHE VILLAGE FOR AUSTRALIA.

BUILDING houses with cards has been a favorite pastime of many a past generation; but it was reserved for the ingenuity of the present day to construct habitations of paper. Yet of this frail material is manufactured the "village" shown in the accompanying Illustration.

Papier-mâché has long been extensively employed for the interior decorations of houses; but to Messrs. Bielefield is due the merit of applying the elegant material in external constructions; and, having been commissioned by Mr. Seymour—a gentleman about to take up his residence in Australia—to manufacture for him a certain number of portable houses, the *paper village* was executed, and temporarily set up at the works of Messrs. Bielefield, near the Staines station of the South-Western Railway. The village is composed of ten houses, including a villa, with nine rooms, 12 feet high; a store-house, 80 feet long, with four dwelling-rooms (sitting-room, two bed-rooms, and kitchen, with cooking apparatus); and houses of different sizes, of from two to six rooms. The Villa on the left of the upper Illustration has a drawing-room and dining-room, each with a bay-window; also, a hall, several bed-rooms, two closets, and kitchen. The interior decorations are so complete as to render it next to impossible for fancy yourself in any other than a brick dwelling. The mantel-pieces in the drawing and dining-rooms are of papier-mâché, have a caryatidal figure on each side, and are of bold design.

The material of the several houses is of patent waterproof, papier-mâché, and the construction is also patented. It consists of paper and rags, beautifully ground and reduced to pulp, which, when dry and pressed, become as hard as a board. There is no lath-and-plaster, yet the walls are solid, indeed more so than in half the partitions of houses built in the present day. They are also double walled, so as to allow of free ventilation all round, and in the roof. The roofs are nearly flat, being just sufficiently curved to throw off the rain. The flooring can be taken up in large square pieces, joists and all. The walls and ceilings are in like compartments, and afford every facility for either taking down or raising with despatch. One of the smaller houses has been taken down and re-erected in the space of four hours.



ROOM IN A PAPIER-MACHE VILLA.

During the late floods, these houses were nearly two feet under water, yet were not injured.

We are assured by Messrs. Bielefield, the patentees of this new material and construction, that it will make good buildings for barracks, park-lodges, and shooting-boxes for the Moors; as well as for additions to houses, as billiard-rooms, &c.

EXTENSIVE SHOW OF PINE-APPLES.

ABOUT ten years have elapsed since Messrs. John and James Adam and Co., of Pudding-lane, Lower Thames-street, sold by auction the first large cargo of Pine-apples imported into England; since which time they have annually held large sales of this luxuriant fruit; and this extensive trade has, doubtless, acted as great encouragement to the growers and shippers, in conveying the fruit to this country in as perfect a state as possible. The fastest sailing fruit schooners, of about 120 tons burden are carefully selected for the voyage; and they are fitted in a very superior manner, by which means both the beauty and the condition of this fruit are well preserved.

The *Prospero*, *Ipswich Lass*, *Susan*, *Isabel*, *Black Cat* (of the two last of which Messrs. Adam are the owners), and a few other vessels have been principally employed in this trade, and have generally performed their passages in a very short space of time; some of the above-named having brought cargoes in less than 24 days.

Eleuthera, a small narrow island, one of the Bahamas in the West Indies, is the place from which the greater quantity of fruit is imported. There are annually cultivated large quantities of pines, which have a very beautiful appearance. When approaching ripeness, they are plucked from the ground with the entire root, and are carefully stowed on board the vessel in the same state.

Originally some little difficulty existed respecting the manner of showing the prices when offered for sale; but this has been overcome by Messrs. Adam, who have built a new warehouse upon a very convenient plan, where the Pines are exhibited to the best advantage.

Our Artist has represented one of the rooms, with a fine display of the beautiful fruit.

The cargo of the *Susan* has just been sold by Messrs. Adam, who expect about the middle of the present month the arrival of the clipper schooner *Seud*, with a cargo of fine pines, which will be the last arrival this season.

Fig. 1:. A page from 'The Illustrated London News' of the 6th August 1853, showing how Mr. Seymour's papier mache village for Australia wood look.

It was through the trade with the Orient that Europe became attracted to decorative papier mache and set about first imitating and then developing the exotic oriental lacquered furniture that was to blossom and flourish during the Victorian period. It is usually this lacquer ware, inlaid with mother-of-pearl that springs to mind when one thinks of papier mache. John Peele wrote in 1732 about the growing interest in papier mache lacquer ware:

> *In Japan the people have a method of making bowls, plates and other vessels from paper and sometimes fine sawdust...these vessels are very light and strong when they come to be varnished and are in great esteem among us. (5,p.15)*

John Baskerville in 1740 began successfully imitating the lacquered papier mache from Japan and subsequently this layered technique became known as 'Japanning'. His assistant Henri Clay invented the method of preparing papier mache that was not only stronger than wood but virtually heat proof.

Paper pulp was mixed with glue or gum arabic and the pulp steam kneaded and passed through rollers to achieve a slab of uniform thickness. This was dried slowly at a low temperature to prevent warping. The panels that Clay moulded from papier mache were made of up ten or more sheets of soft, unsized paper,

both sides of each sheet was pasted with a mixture of boiled glue and flour and laid into a mould, this was drenched in linseed oil and dried at a low temperature of 100ºF. They were then ready to be used as panels, generally for ceilings and partitions. (20,p.14)

When Henri Clay's patent expired many small firms sprang up, centred mainly in Birmingham and Wolverhampton. Virtually everything was produced from buttons to beds. (Fig:2)(20,p.8)

Jennens and Bettridge, established in 1816, is the famous company we associate with the period, who took over the Clay workshop. The firm boasted shops in London and New York and produced papier mache objects of superb quality and decoration which are now largely museum pieces. (Fig:3) (5,pp.43–51) The company used only the best quality paper for their warranted goods.

Papier mache means 'mashed' or 'chewed' paper and it may be the French emigrant workers working in the papier mache workshops in London during the 18th century from whom we get the name. It is believed that the workers actually did prepare the pulp by chewing. (5,p.3) Certainly manufacturers did nothing to discourage the popularity of this idea, as it helped to shroud in mystery exactly how they did prepare their papier mache. So jealously guarded were their methods of

Fig. 2: Elaborate suite of furniture made of wood and decorated papier mache for the Great Exhibition of 1851. The matching floral panels were decorated with mother of pearl and remain in perfect condition. The entire suite was priced at £1,000 in 1958.

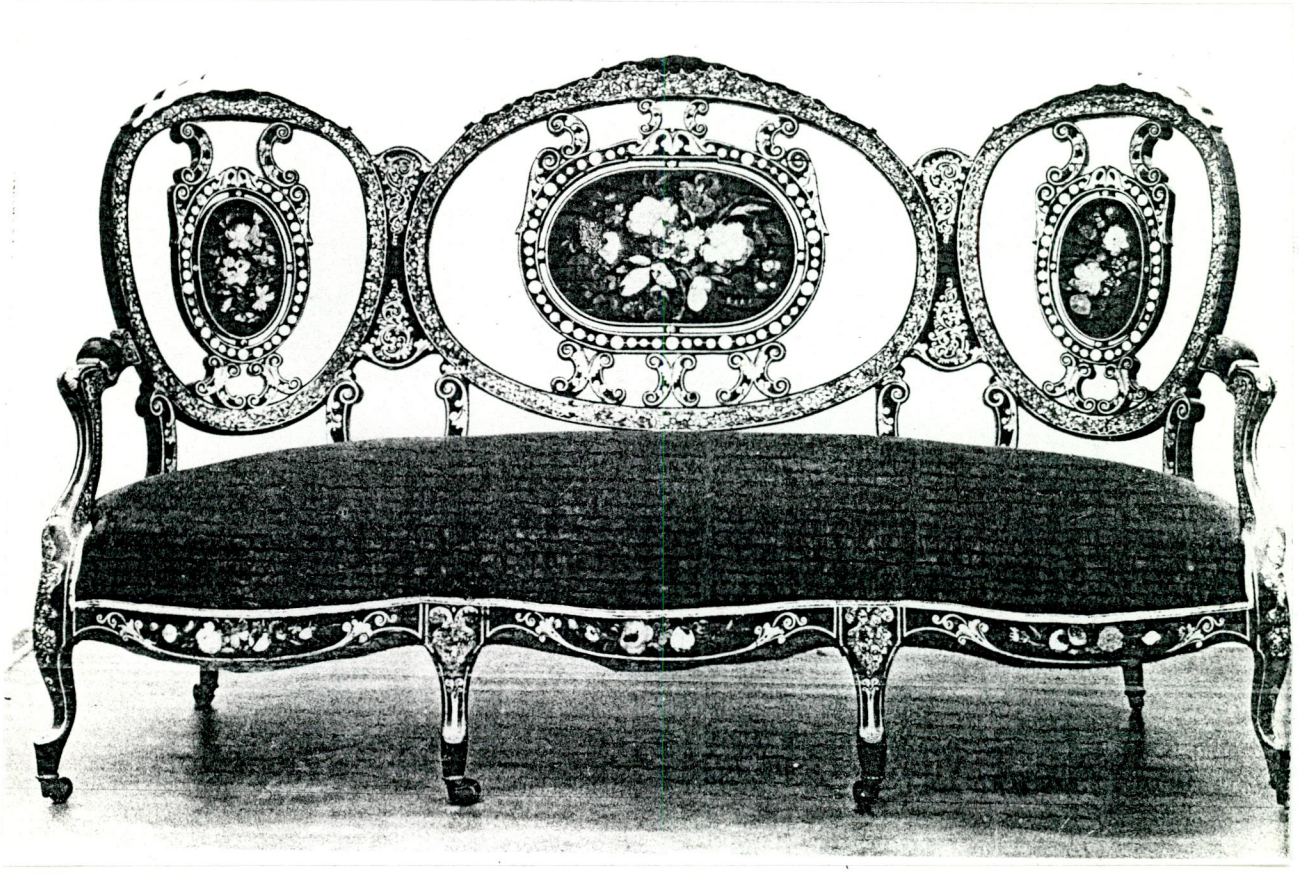


Fig. 3: Large settee of wood and papier mache, japanned and ornamented mother of pearl and paint. Victoria & Albert Museum.

preparation that even today we only know that papier mache was made with a binder of glue or gum arabic, flour, sawdust, resin, wax and plaster or combinations of these with probably other ingredients that we know nothing of.

At the time of the Great Exhibition, in 1851, papier mache was at the apex of its popularity with hardly a household item that could not be made of the wondrous material. Little, however, was made of the fact that heavier pieces of furniture, such as bed frames, had still to be made of wood. Hans Huth, author of 'Lacquer of the West', correctly states that 'in effect the papier mache of the 19th century was make believe'. (10,p.211) This is because the attraction of papier mache furniture was greatly due to the novelty of the medium. The Georgians and Victorians were deliberately led and wanted to believe that all the items were entirely constructed of paper. And so, not surprisingly, an enormous following and fashion developed.

In 1880 papier mache reached a degree of perfection that prevented it being used as a material for mass production techniques. Manufacturers were impatient to cater more speedily to a growing more wealthier section of the market. The invention of electroplating killed off the papier mache trade. In 1864 Jennens and Bettridge had to close its New York branch. The manufacturers

turned their attention to laminated wood, iron, plaster and plastic. Suddenly papier mache, as a fashion, no longer existed.

Another contributory factor towards the rapid decline was that starch dresses and heavy underskirts, worn by women, would simply be too heavy for the paper chairs. Social mishaps like these would not have to occur too often before the offending pieces were removed, never to return. (20,p.11)

Meanwhile, folk art and traditional papier mache is alive and well, since its origin, in China 2,000 years ago. Paper making was slow laborious work, so it would follow that good use was put to the off-cuts and scrap and so papier mache was invented. One of the earliest Chinese uses of papier mache was extraordinarily for the making of war helmets, which were toughened by lacquering. Two examples exist today dating back to the invention of paper itself at the end of the 2nd century. In 1910 Ryuzo Torii discovered the remains of red lacquered pot lids in the shell mounds of Port Arthur, Manchuria. These finds are thought to be of the Han dynasty, circa AD 206. (5,p.4)

All this happened so long ago, yet today as Paul Johnson, a successful artist, has said, that the art form is in its infancy. Papier mache is one of the oldest yet youngest recognized art forms. 'A truism known by the Orient for a near 2,000

years, but only discussed in the West [as an art form] in the last decade or two'. (25,p.5)

From China papier mache spread to Japan and to Persia, where it was largely used for the making of masks festival ornaments and boxes.(fig:4) The medium slowly moved westward reaching Europe by the 17th century. Papier mache reached a peak of interest during this century in France, when the stage designers and prop men of the Baroque period used it for innumerable theatrical performances at the court of Louis XIV. (17,p.13)

Papier mache has evolved from strong ancient traditions of folk art from the worlds rich ethnic cultures, particularly India, Japan and Mexico. In these countries the medium is used richly capturing its peoples beliefs, traditional values and mythologies.

The Indian regions of Kashmir and Bihar, have a tradition of making folk art papier mache since the 15th century, items such as dressing table ware, bangles, lamp shades, cups, bowls, vases, wall plaques and boxes have been produced. (1,p.18)

The old method of construction entailed gathering waste paper from printing presses which was then left to soak in a vat of water for between 5 to 6 days. It was then trampled by foot to mix it up and the water drained out. The paper

Fig. 4: Persian papier mache box lid decorated and lacquered.(12" x 19") Victoria & Albert Museum.

was then formed into pulp by hand and placed in a mould for 2 to 3 days. The hardened pulp was removed from the moulds and the two halves joined. The surface was rubbed fine with a stone to make it smooth and a varnish was applied to make the surface impermeable. The object was painted and finally lacquered to seal and finish it. (23,p.99)

This traditional method of making papier mache was extremely labour intensive, hence today the medium tends to be used to make simple curved shapes such as vases and trinket boxes. These items are widely available in ethnic craft shops or gift stores all over Ireland. (Fig:5&6) Patterns are painted on freehand, no design guide or stencil is used. The designs are done by all the family, and freely copied from one family to another. (1,p.18)

The technique is also known to the village women of Madhubani, Bihar who use pulped paper, usually newsprint, mixed with glue to model figures of the wedding pair at marriage ceremonies and of 'Ganesha' women either weaning babies or winnowing grain. (Fig:7) These figures are particularly interesting as they are not aimed towards western tastes. The women employ very little colouring material and customarily paint with natural pigments thick black lines on the greyish background of the poignant figures. (23,p.105) These industrious women are concerned with portraying the importance of the mother

Fig. 5: Hand painted papier mache trinket boxes, Kashmir, India. 'Gobal Crafts', Dublin.

Fig:5

Fig. 6: Hand painted papier mache pencil cases and boxes. Kashmir, India. 'Global Crafts', Dublin.

Fig. 7: Doll, housewife sifting grain. Natural pigments on papier mache, contemporary. (15 x 10cm) Work of Chandrakala Devi, Madhubani, Bihar, India. Typically, the head cloth is prominent in all female renderings as in this doll which holds a winnowing tray, its fingers sorting grain.

Fig: 6.

figure and women engaged in household chores, just like Deborah Schneebeli–Morrell, a successful contemporary English artist also working in papier mache, whose work will be discussed in the final chapters.

It was during the Japanese Edo (1615–1868) period, from the beginning of the 17th century, that folk toys first gained their wide public appeal. Folk toys now in Japan have come to be considered gifts from the gods to protect children. They usually take the form of lions, oxen, foxes, fish and small bells. (Fig:8) Birds, dogs, tigers and monkey are considered to have powers against evil spirits. (1,p.16)

In South West Japan papier mache toys have been the playthings of the upper classes, of the Okinawa Islands, for generations. It is felt by many that the high quality of the dolls reflects the strong reigious sense that prevails there. This is not surprising since Japanese paper has long been the most humblest and most sacred of substances. 'Paper has been prime material and medium of expression for the Japanese psyche. It has touched all life in Japan.'[1]

In Mexico, as in Japan, many of the toys and dolls made from papier mache are tied in with religion and superstition e.g. little papier mache 'Judases' are made to commemorate Holy Week around Easter. A well known favourite toy around

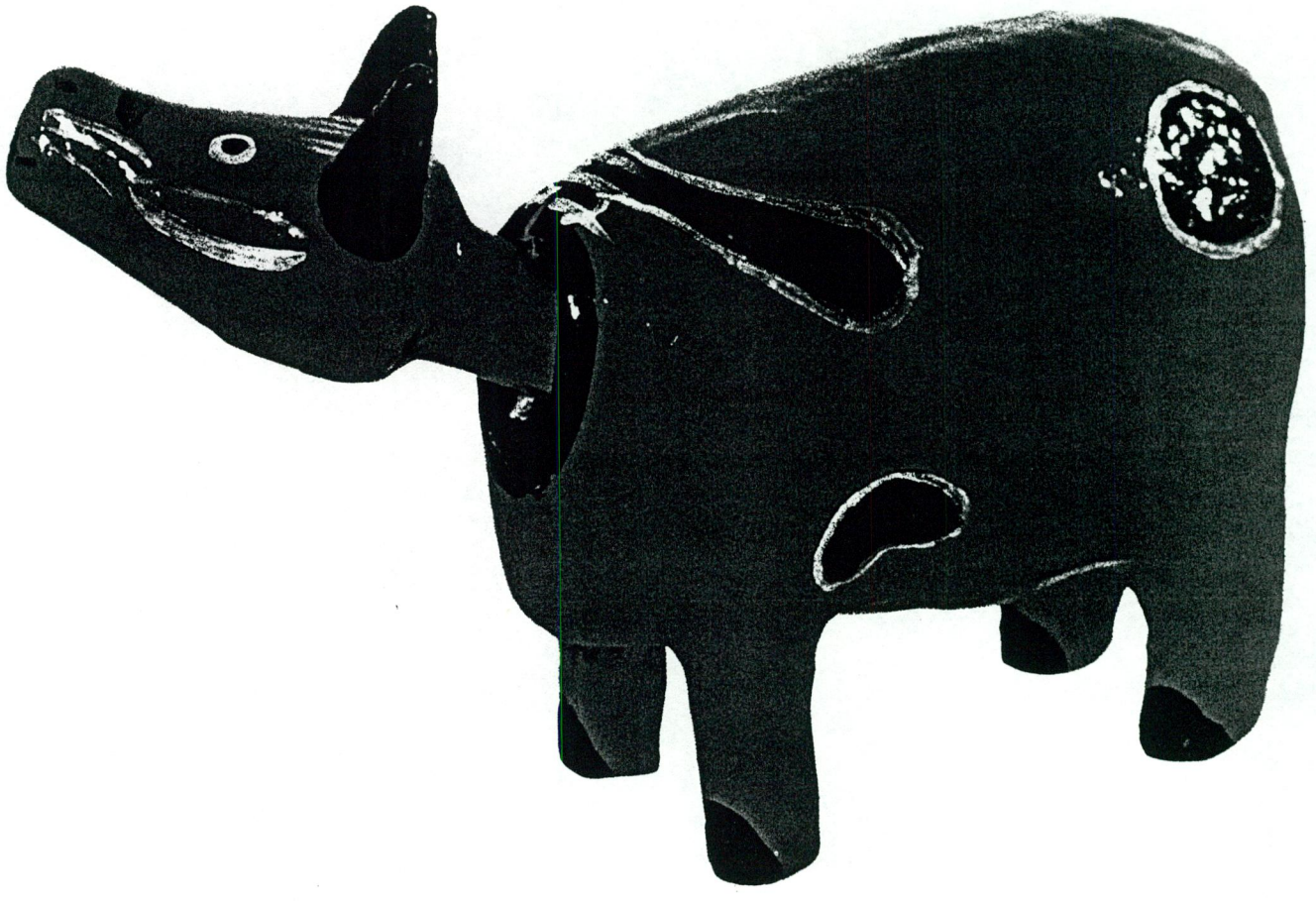


Fig. 8: Japanese papier mache cow with nodding head, 20th century. Mingei Museum of World Folk Arts. (H 20cm)

Christmas time is the colourful pinata, enjoyed by Mexican children in villages and cities alike.

Mexican hand made papier mache toys are among the most abundant and imaginative in the world. Makers combine indigenous materials and methods with those of other lands. Papier mache is an introduced skill by the Spanish, yet it has become one of the most exciting and explored means of its craftspeople expression. The variety and richness of colour and form give the folk objects a feeling which comes from a genuiness and spontaneity of expression. Which in turn is combined with skill and inherited knowledge.

Folk art has flourished throughout Mexican history either in the form of objects for practical use, for decorative use or for ritual purposes. It is the ritual and decorative papier mache work created for and influenced by the Day of the Dead that shall be discussed, in the following two chapters, in order illustrate that Mexican folk art papier mache is amongst the most vital and diverse in the world, and to show its influence and relationship on the current revival of the medium.

CHAPTER TWO

MEXICAN TRADITIONAL PAPIER MACHE FOR THE DAY OF THE DEAD

Mexico, of all the modern nations in the American continent, has behind her a rich continuous artistic heritage, reaching back over a period of two centuries. Diverse and contrasting the sources and phases of Mexican art have been, with each period leaving its own legacy of works of art of high originality and expressive power. Many different art forms have flourished in the country, fusing the old with the new. Papier mache is the art and craft form, although quite new in respect of other craft traditions, which shall be investigated.

The most striking and creative papier mache artefacts to be found are associated with All Souls Day and the Day of the Dead on the 1st and 2nd days of November. Brightly coloured and decorated skeletons and skulls made from papier mache are to be seen all over Mexico. (Fig:9&10) Although production is chiefly aimed at children many adults delight in the wit and exuberance of Mexican papier mache toys. During their lifetime celebrated artists, Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo collected such play things.(26,p1) These toys have changed very little in over a century.

Masks have been traditional in Mexico since before the Spanish Conquest. Mexican Indians would wear masks representing the faces of the gods they wish to honour. Hunters wore masks

Fig. 9: Papier mache skeletal orchestra, work of Juan Martin Garcia Duran, Mexico City. (H 35cm) ' The Skeleton at the Feast' exhibtion, Museum of Mankind 1991–1992.

Paper from
orchestra
21cm. (Fig 9)

Fig. 10. Papier mache skeletons portrayed in everyday activities in the keeping with the broadsheets of Jose Guadalupe Posada. Mexico City. (H 29cm) Male and female skeletons are shown buying and selling pots, newspapers, shawls, bread, fruit and traditional foods.

bearing the faces of the animals they hoped to capture. (4.p124) Masks today are usually made of papier mache and can be purchased for only a few cents. They are usually made specifically for either Christmas, Easter or the celebration of the Day of the Dead.

A child's papier mache skull mask came into my possession, purchased in Mexico city for a mere IR£2.(Fig:11) Similar examples were on display at the Skeleton at the Feast – Day of the Dead exhibition in the Museum of Mankind.(Fig:12) From these I was able to discover that these skull masks are hand made in great numbers in the town of Celaya, Guanajuanto and sold in Mexico City. There is a strong healthy folk tradition of papier mache particularly in this region. The mask is crafted with low quality brown and waste papers pasted with en grudo, which is a combination of whole wheat, flour, starch and water, mixed over a flame, over a mould.(18,p.3) It is then hand painted in traditional skull fashion and the eyes cut out. Present day natives wear masks for the same reasons as their ancestors, in order to exert magic and achieve a new identity.

The reason for such an explosion of colourful papier mache and other crafts around October is simple, the importance of the Mexican concept of death. The death symbol has produced the greatest wealth of material. (22,p.53) In Aztec belief there was no concept of Hell and

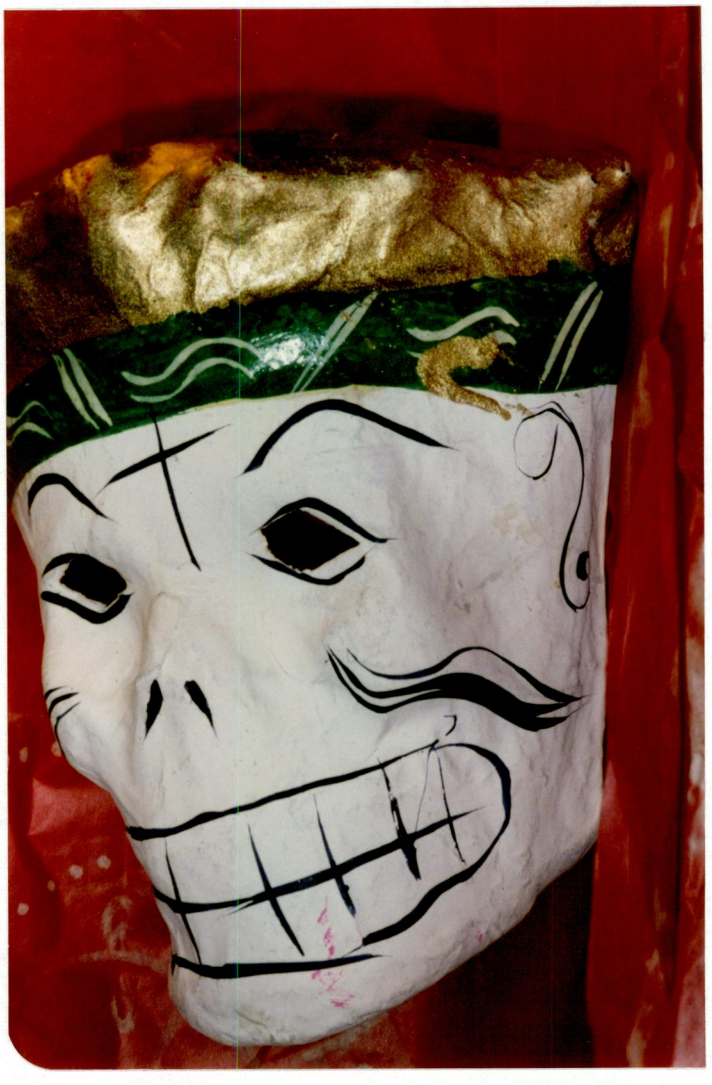


Fig. 11: Childs' Day of the Dead skull mask. Papier mache. (H 21cm) Celaya, Mexico.

Fig.11

Fig. 12:. Range of papier mache skull masks and skulls. Celaya and Mexico City. 'The Skeleton at the Feast' exhibition, Museum of Mankind 1991–1992

the symbols of death were symbols of the renewal of life. The gods had sacrificed themselves to create human life and in their turn were sustained by human sacrifice. Death was a necessity that ensured the continuity of life. (2,pp.25–35)

In the sculptures, pottery and painted books of preHispanic Mexico and other countries of Meso America there are many representations of the gods and spirits associated with death and the rituals of ceremonies of death and sacrifice.(Fig:13&14) Since there are also survivals of preHispanic religious belief and practice among the present day Indian peoples of Mexico, the study of their customs such as those relating to the Day of the Dead can also illumine the ancient past.(26,p.3)

The Spanish Conquest between 1518 and 1521 destroyed much of the ancient and indigenous civilization. However, the mingling of native Mexican and Spanish traditions produced, for better or worse, a new concept of death and way of life. Catholicism was introduced and the Mexican Day of the Dead came about.

Today, Mexicans still believe that life and death are complimentary. Death lacks the solemn powerful funereal feeling that it generates in other countries. It is treated with familiarity and celebrated rather than mourned. (22,p.431) The expression of death is seen most fully in the celebration of el

Fig. 13: Aztec stone sculpture of a woman with skull face. AD 1300–1521 (H 72cm) 'Skeleton at the Feast' exhibition, Museum of Mankind 1991–1992.

Fig. 14: Detail of a stone sculpture representing a '*tzompantli*' (skull rack). From the Maya site of Chichen Itza, Yucatan. c AD 1200.

Dia de Los Muertos or Day of the Dead. It is a time for prayers of intercession for those baptized Christians believed to be in purgatory. Octavio Paz writes:

> *For the modern Mexican, death lacks meaning. It has stopped being transitory, and access to another life that offers more life than our own. But the incon-sequence of death does not make us eliminate it from our daily life. For the New Yorker, Parisian or Londoner, death is a word never pronounced, as it burns the lips. In turn the Mexican often visits with it, caresses it, sleeps with it and throws parties for it; It is one of his favourite toys and his most permanent lover. It is true that in his attitude there may perhaps be as much fear as in the case of others, but at least he does not hide from it, nor does he hide it; he contemplates it face to face; with impatience, disdain and irony: If they are to kill me tomorrow, they may as well kill me right away.*
>
> *(22, p.53)*

Death is manifested in all facets of the folk and cultural life of Mexico. Death amuses children through its representation of ingenious toys and happy skeletons, particularly candy sugar skulls. They are given to children and friends, this is not seen as in any way macabre or sinister. The name of the recipient can even be piped in coloured icing onto the forehead of the skull.

> *Can we imagine ourselves munching through the sugar skulls of mothers-in-law or letting a teething babe gnaw on the sugar coffin that is the memorial of an earlier infants death?*

(32,p.26)

At the end of the 19th century a forceful and revolutionary artist made his appearance in Mexico, Jose Guadalupe Posada (1852–1913). His engravings provide a vivid panorama of Mexican daily life. (Fig:15) The freedom with which he expressed his ideas and feelings, which were highly critical of society, places him among the first Expressionists (6,p.18). Posada's influence on twentieth century art in Mexico is immense. His work greatly influenced Diego Rivera and his contemporaries and today is echoed in the work of Mexico City's popular artists, such as the Linares and Saulo Moreno.

Posada is chiefly remembered for his death imagery which often took the form of the 'Calavera', literally 'skull'. The term denotes a satirical broadsheet carrying illustrated verses for the Day of the Dead. (Fig:16) Then as now, Calaveras' served as witty epitaphs for the living and provided an opportunity for social comment and political criticism. (6,p.18)

Skulls and skeletons have long been used to show the absurdity of the human condition. Posada was able to draw on earlier traditions. The engravings of medieval Europe and colonial Mexico often used death in this way. Such as Daumier of France and Goya of Spain had done before him. (22,p.89)

Fig. 15: Engraving showing a 'Calavera of a Water-Bearer', Jose Guadulape Posada. c 1905.

Fig. 16: Original engraving by J. G. Posada, showing Death addressing skulls and skeletons in a graveyard. In the background a tram with skeleton passengers. 'The Skeleton at the Feast' exhibition Museum of Mankind 1991–1992.

In journals such as 'El Calavera', (The Skull), which was first published in 1847, the skeleton image played its part in the commentary on events.(2,p.152) But the skeletons of Posada wore clothing in contemporary styles and indulged in the customs of the period. Market vendors, musicians, lovers, priests, soldiers and socialites were all portrayed as skeletons. Many of these images Posada created are still present today in the popular imagery of the urban celebration of the 'Day of the Dead'. The same figures of their modern equivalents are rendered in papier mache and other materials by countless artists.

Many of these artist/craftspeople have risen to prominence as individual creators. Their work is sold in shops and galleries and bought by collectors from Mexico City and abroad. This expanding market acts as a stimulus and brings financial rewards denied to earlier generations. The Linares family and Saulo Moreno are such artists. (2,p.133) No longer content to reproduce traditional forms they are seeking to express a personal vision and all speak of the affection and respect which death inspires. 'We think of La Muerte as a woman. We show her in papier mache, pottery or wood. We give her a form and a presence. You can be married, you can be single, but she'll have you in the end...',Leonardo Linares (26,p.4).

CHAPTER THREE

MEXICAN 'POPULAR ART' PAPIER MACHE ARTISTS

—THE LINARES FAMILY

—SAULO MORENO

Artisans in Mexico rarely study their calling in a school or college. They learn their skills from parents or neighbours and express their emotions and beliefs through their creations. Although papier mache was introduced to Mexico by the Spanish, it has become a thoroughly Mexican medium for artistic expression. Three generations of the Linares family are currently working in the medium.

From the region of Celaya and its tradition originated the well known Linares family. They came to Mexico City, headed by the then young Don Miguel Linares, a great grandfather today. Don Miguel has devoted his life to the elaboration of papier mache toys and 'Judas' figures. The term describes papier mache figures which sometimes take the form of devils and skeletons. (Fig:17) He is also the creator of the fantastic brightly painted figures he has named 'alebrijes' (imaginary creatures). Don Miguel has taught his technique to his sons and grandchildren and even great grandchildren. His most remarkable and well known pieces are the 'Day of the Dead' figures which are inspired without a doubt by the 'Calaveras' of J.G. Posada.

For three generations the members of the Linares family have had the special creative talent of developing the theme of death in papier mache skeletons. These can measure either many metres

Fig. 17: Devil papier mache skeleton, by a member of the Linares Family, Mexico City. 'The Skeleton at the Feast', Museum 0f Mankind 1991–1992.

Fig. 18: 'Texas Rodeo', by the Linares family, Mexico City. 1986. Papier mache. (H.4ft) 'El Dia de Los Meurtos' exhibition, Serpentine Gallery 1988.

or a few centimetres. The 'Rodeo' papier mache exhibition, commissioned by Forthworth Art Museum, Texas, accompanied the 'El Dia de Los Muertos' (The Day of the Dead) exhibition which travelled to London, to the Serpentine Gallery, Kensington Gardens in 1988. Pedro (now the head of the family), Felipe, Leonardo and David Linares, all sculpted papier mache figures and skulls on the Texan popular sport. The work reflects their great imagination and skill. (Fig:18)

The expressions captured in the skull faces are magical. The skeletons are laughing and enjoying themselves. This is quite an achievement, considering the absence of the facial features and tissue. The skeleton figures are lively and colourful maintaining the Mexican papier mache tradition. The spirit of a Texan rodeo is masterfully captured, delighting the spectator, despite the representation of death on buckarooing skeletal horses.

In the same manner members of the Linares family, including Don Miguel, participated in the creating of the skull figures that represent some of the characters in Diego Rivera's mural 'Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park', 1947, in the Hotel del Prado, Mexico City. (Fig:19) In the densely packed composition, the murals central feature is the 'Catrina Calavera' or 'Skeleton', seen holding the hand of Rivera as a young boy and on the other side we can see Rivera's great artistic

Fig. 19: 'Dream of a Sunday afternoon in Alameda Park', 1947, mural by Diego Rivera, Hotel Prado, Mexico City.

mentor, the engraver Jose Guadalupe Posada. Directly behind and part of this group is the figure of Frida Kahlo, Diego's second wife. Surrounding these central figures, in the foreground, are scenes depicting a cross-section of Mexican history and society. Calaveras are also recurring themes in Riveras work, they play a very important role in Mexican twentieth century art.

Just as Posada's engraved Calavera's influenced Diego Rivera's mural, these same Calaveras inspire the work of Mexico City's popular artists, particularly the Linares' family. In their papier mache version of 'Dream of a Sunday Afternoon in Alameda Park', 1985, we can see Rivera's characters in three dimensional forms. His mural is an excellent source for the Linares, as his characters translate well into papier mache. (Fig:20/21/22)

I believe the 'Catrina' skeleton is particularly successful. (Fig:22) The feelings experienced from this Calavera 'Catrina' were of awe and excitement. She is an excellent example of papier mache at its best, and shows that the art of papier mache is very much alive.

'La Catrina' is the most universally recognized Calavera.(fig:23) She is a grand skeleton wearing a huge hat, a feather boa, and sumptuous french gown. She is a symbol of Porifian society and the symbol of a country governed by death. The 'Catrina'

Fig. 20: Papier mache figures from 'Dream of a Sunday afternoon in Alameda Park', 1985, by the Linares family, Mexico City. 'El Dia de Los Meurtos' exhibition, Serpentine Gallery 1988.

Fig. 21: Papier mache figures from 'Dream of a Sunday afternoon in Alameda Park' 1985, by the Linares family, Mexico City. Serpentine Gallery 1988.

Fig. 22: Detail of 'Calavera Catrina' from 'Dream of a Sunday afternoon in Alameda Park', 1985, by the Linares family, Mexico City. Serpentine Gallery 1988.

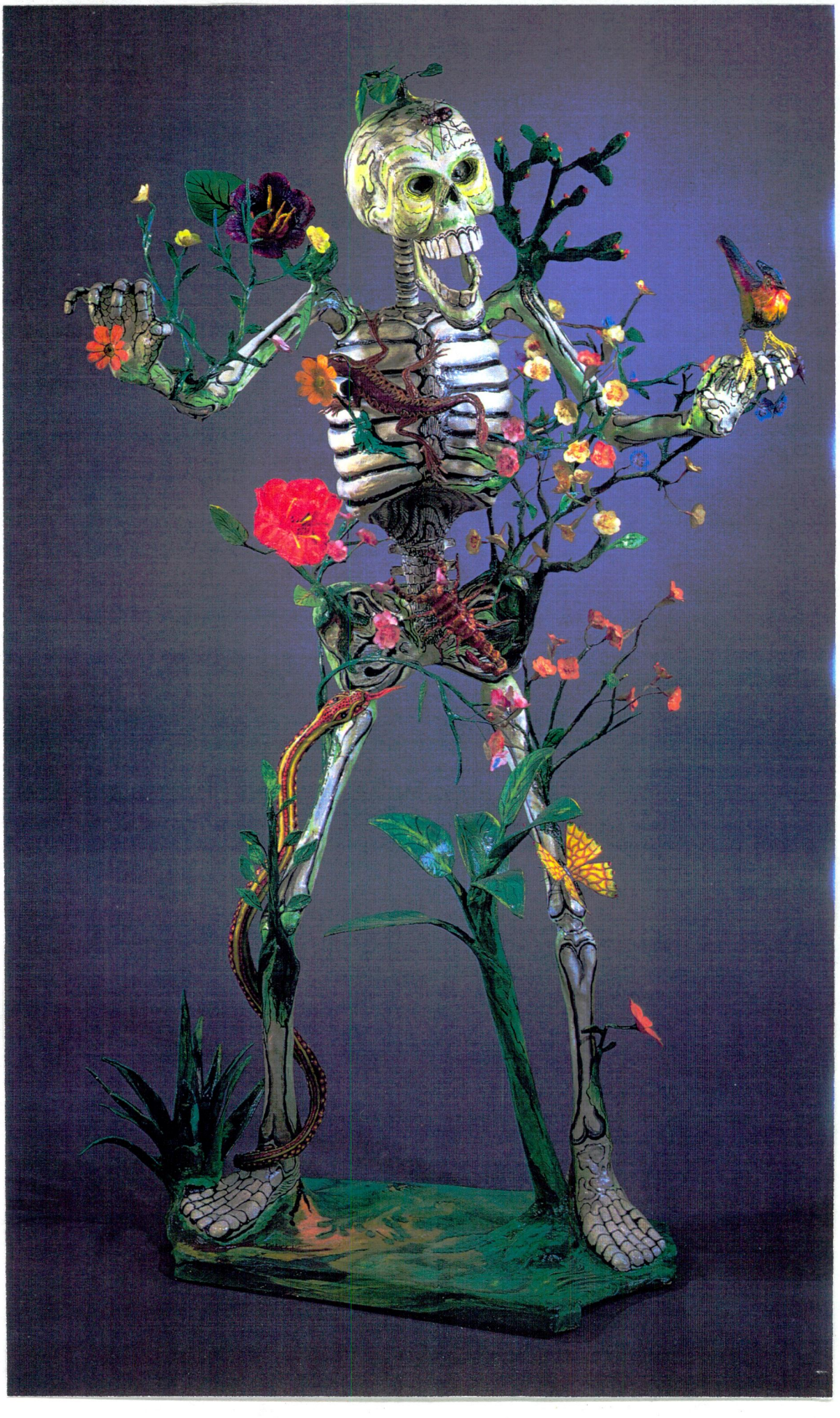


Fig. 23: 'The Flowering Skeleton', by Felipe Linares, Mexico City. Life size papier mache figure (H 170cm). 'The skeleton at the Feast', Museum of Mankind 1991–1992.

skeleton was the Mexican version of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse. (This 'Apocalypse' theme is another major group of papier mache skeletons, sculpted by, yet again, the Linares family in 1987, commissioned by the Museum of Popular Arts and Industries, Mexico City). She had governed with her bony hand, suffocating equality, all desire for liberty and was reaching the lengthy end of her empire. Behind her peeks the fleshless face of Coatilicue, goddess of the Earth, whose nourishment consists of the hearts of sacrificial victims. (22,p.90) Recognized by everyone, the image of 'La Catrina' has become inseparable from the urban celebrations of the Day of the Dead.

Mexico City is a metropolis, with an ever rapid growing population. Its population of 70,000,000 is expected to double by the year two thousand. Unemployment has become a chronic problem and most of the inhabitants live in poverty. (21,p.6) Perhaps this accounts for the popularity of 'La Catrina' as her original role was too satirically comment on the injustices of the 'Porfiriato' period.[2] President Profirio Diaz dictated Mexico for almost thirty five years. 'He developed his country at the expense of his countrymen'.[3] A wealthy middle class flourished, but the poor of the cities and rural areas suffered deeply.

The Linares' figures from Diego Rivera's mural can be read as social and political comments, just as Posada and Rivera

intended in their respective works. Thus 'La Catrina' is once again used to remind and teach the people of Mexico about the wrongs and injustices of the past and present.

The Linares' 'Catrina' is just as powerful and dramatic as Rivera's painted version of 1947. She has the added impact of being a life size three dimensional form. The Linares have managed to interpret her successfully with their own distinct style. Her jaw has been narrowed displaying the traditional hollow grin. Her bony claw–like hands are painted with red nail polish, as in the original, making her all the more venomous. Her lamp shade hat just about covers her deep black eye sockets. 'La Catrina' is the largest figure of both works stressing her importance and power. The Linares, have gone to town, by painting her feathered boa in such vivid colours, fluorescent yellow, turquoise blue and bright pink. In Rivera's version they are merely tinted shades. The rich, lively colours give her added zest and are echoed in her cheek bones making her seem more credible. Her proportions work very well and her height is cleverly balanced with her huge hat. The Linares' brushwork is spontaneous, with lovely weight distribution in the line work, proving skilfully effective.

The most refined work in papier mache at the 'Skeleton at the Feast' exhibition was by Felipe Linares, entitled 'The Flowering Skeleton' or 'La Calavera

Enramada' (Fig:24&25) This life sized skeleton is of a new style. One's attention is immediately drawn to the crispness of detail. The quality of craftsmanship is obvious if one compares the skeleton to any of the previous examples, particularly the 'La Catrina' skeleton accompanying the Museum of Mankind exhibition. (Fig:26) Of course the approach and style of the Linares who made this 'Catrina' may have been deliberate. Its roughness and crudeness possess admirable qualities of their own.

This piece is similar to the works that Felipe is regularly commissioned to sculpt for the various galleries and private collectors of the popular arts of Mexico. No indication is given towards the symbolism of the flowers and creatures sprouting from and about the skeletons body. It is obviously Felipes intention for his audience to deduce their own ideas.

Cane, wire, heavy brown paper and an adhesive paste of wheat and flour and water are used in its construction. A mould has been used for the skull and the thorax, but most of the other elements are hand modelled. Felipe finishes his figures with a coat of white gesso, decorated with commercial paints and finally varnishes the finished piece. All these methods and materials are basically employed by papier mache artists throughout the world.

Fig. 24: 'La Catrina' engraving by Jose Guadalupe Posada (1852–1913). This caricature of a society woman has become one of the most popular images associated with the Day of the Dead in Mexico.

(Fig 33)

La Catrina
José Guadalupe Posada (1852-1913)
This caricature of a society woman has become one of the most popular images associated with the Day of the Dead in Mexico.

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Fig. 25: Detail of 'Flowering Skeleton'. See no. 23.

Fig. 26: 'La Catrina' by member a of the Linares family, Mexico City. Papier mache. 'The Skeleton at the Feast', Museum of Mankind 1991–1992.

Felipe Linares also specializes in the crafting of ornate papier mache skulls he calls 'Craneos de Azucar' or 'Craneos de Primavera' (Spring Skulls or Sugar Skulls) (Fig:27&28) The decoration is highly colourful and elaborate maintaining the Mexican styles of the past. The skulls suggest growth and regeneration. (26,p.9)

In 1986 Felipe's son, Leonardo, was awarded the National Youth Prize for Popular Art.(2,p.151) Examples of his works are are also on display at the 'Skeleton at the Feast' exhibition. In 'Skeleton and Devil Drinking' (Fig:29) one can see the devil being portrayed as a figure of fun. Leonardo uses his medium in the style of his family elders, but his subject matter and themes are composed imaginatively with a new sense of humour, despite the fact that he also borrows from Posada's Calaveras.

In recent years a number of imitators, some trained by the Linares themselves, have also begun to create papier mache figures and forge distinctive styles of their own. One such person is Saulo Moreno, who probably trained under the Linares while he stayed in Mexico City. Today he is a prominent artist living in Tlalpujahua in the state of Michoacan. Moreno also depicts humourous scenes about death. His sculptures are made with papier mache and wire. In them death has been graciously humanized and recreated from simple elements into

Fig. 27: 'Craneos de Azucar' or 'Sugar Skulls', by Felipe Linares, Mexico City. Papier mache (H 27cm). 'The Skeleton at the Feast', Museum of Mankind 1991–1992.

Fig: 27

Fig. 28: 'Craneos de Azucar' or 'Sugar Skulls', by Felipe Linares, Mexico City. Papier mache (H 27cm). Museum of Mankind 1991–1992.

Fig. 29: 'Skeleton and Devil Drinking' by Leonardo Linares, Mexico City. Papier mache. (H 49cm) Museum of Mankind 1991–1992. There was no concept equivalent to Christian Hell in Mexican indigenous religion and devil is often portrayed as a figure of fun.

artistic sculptural works, he calls 'wirelings'.

I particularly enjoy the work of Saulo Moreno. His death figures are spontaneous, airy and fragile. The use of colour is fresh and warm, reflecting his country's climate and tradition. Moreno has broken away from his contemporaries traditional genre of skeleton figures, like Felipe Linares.

Moreno's style is strong and consistent between exhibitions, he uses the same approach and techniques. Moreno still has the fascination for sculpting cyclists, undoubtedly influenced by Posada's engraved versions. The bicycles help to humanize the skeleton creatures even more. While his work may not qualify as 'masterpieces', their fragility and daintiness evoke feelings of fun and pleasure. I do not believe that Moreno has a particular message or story to tell, his simplicity is his strength. His work simply aims to delight.

In 'Skeletons Riding Bicycles' (Fig:30) one can see three winged creatures, each captured magically in the motion of cycling. The first and last skeletons are caught in the act of standing on their pedals, creating the illusion that they are racing along. The connecting horizontal bars of the bicycles increase the impression of great speed, by drawing a line, almost a dart, straight through the work. The haloed skeleton is being chased by the grotesque and devil

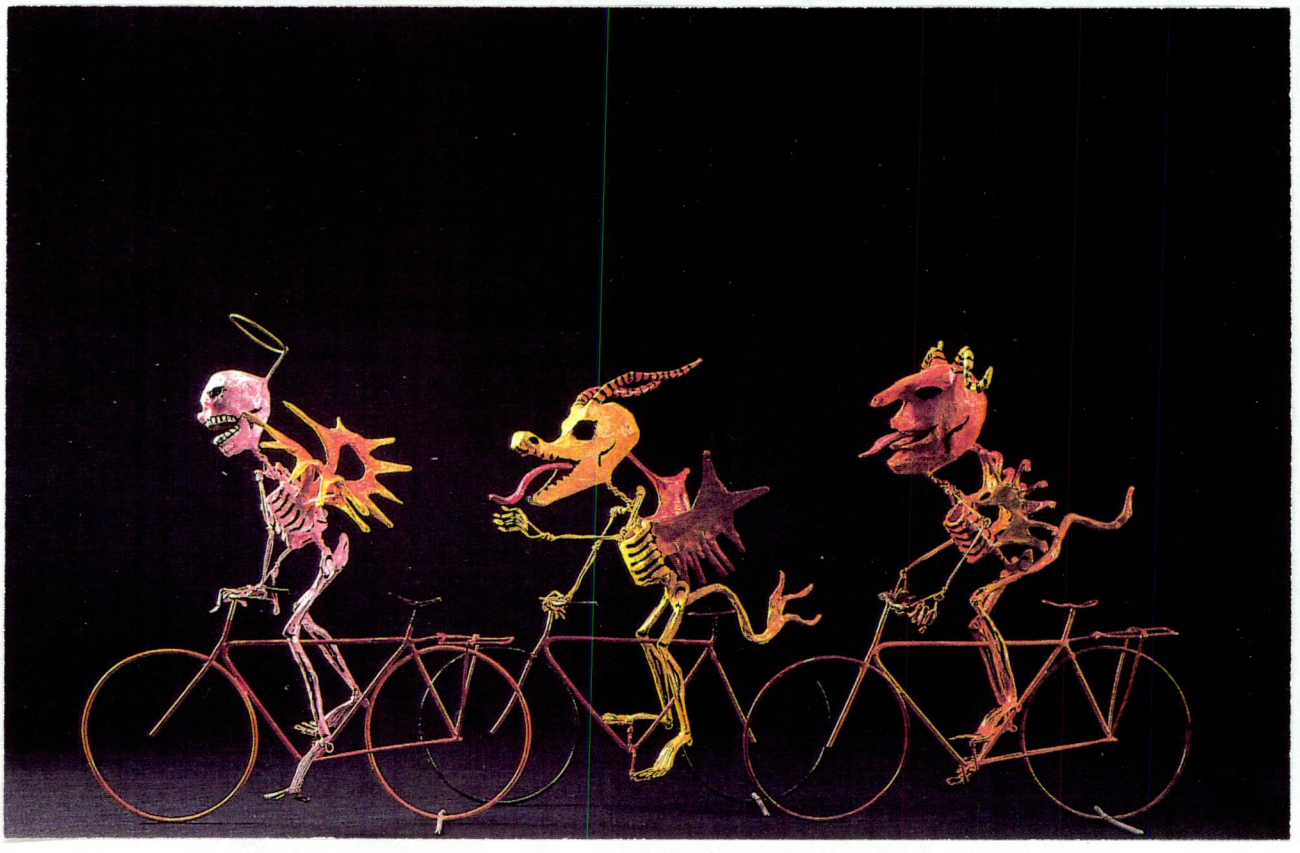

Fig. 30: 'Skeletons Riding Bicycles', 1986, by Saulo Moreno, Tlalpujahua, Michoacan, Mexico. Papier mache and wire (H 40cm). 'El Dia de Los Muertos' exhibition, Serpentine Gallery 1988.

creatures. The work lacks the seriousness and morbidity of its characters, reminding us of the Mexican humorous attitude towards death. The creature and the devil are not horrifyingly grotesque, as they are portrayed kiddishly, sticking out their tongues like nasty little school boys.

The merging colours of the skeletons also add to the feeling of speed. The first figure is a pale pink, the next yellow and the last orangey red. These colours also help us to recognize each figure in question. Red for the devil and a cool shade of pink represents the haloed figure. Yet we see that the wings of the haloed figure are getting warmer, turning yellow and orange. Death is catching up on him. He is only an arms reach away from the spiny tailed creature and devil. 'But she'll [the devil] have you in the end, death will be my last love', believes Leonardo Linares. (26,p.8) No one escapes death, no matter how good a life they have led.

In Mexican popular imagination, death and the devil are often seen as closely linked. They frequently appear together in the work of Mexican artists. This is because of preHispanic beliefs. The after life did not depend on last judgement and the people had no comprehension or belief in a hell, and so, have not inherited a fear of the devil figure. (2,p.28) After the Spanish Conquest ideas and beliefs were merged resulting with many craft workers treating the

devil with irreverent humour and representing him as a figure of fun. However, Pedro Linares makes as distinction between 'El diablo' and 'El demonio'. The first inspires laughter and the second fear. (26,p.5) (Fig:31)

The detail of the devil skeleton, (Fig:32) reveals more. One is immediately attracted to the twisting ram–like horns which are colourfully tiger striped and the red–orange face which quirkily hangs out its elongated tongue. Its large nose emerges from its forehead, finally adding to its humour. Moreno has made a splendid caricature. In this detail the construction and media of the figure is evident. The limbs are made from fine wire, twisted and looped at the joints and papier mache is used to create the torso, wings and the creatures head and features. Moreno finally paints his figures with industrial gloss paints.

From Saulo Moreno's work in both exhibitions balance and pose are very important features. Each individual figure he creates distributes its weight convincingly in some stance or action. He accurately captures them riding and balancing on bicycles, and in 'Newspaper Vendors on a Bicycle' (Fig:33) one can see a figure cycling and holding onto a pile of newpapers, while the other figure balances on a huge stack, three times the size of the first, on the back of the bike. The 'Skeletal Animal' (Fig:34) holds a proud pose. Its head is held upright and tail is

Fig. 31: 'Papier mache Devil and Pedro Linares', Mexico City.


(Fig:30)

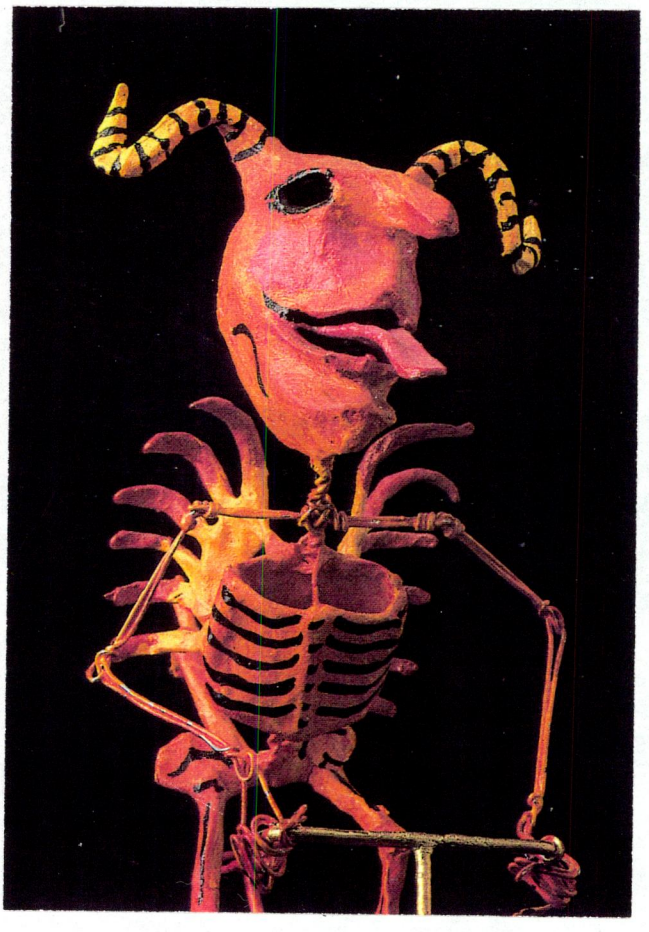

Fig. 32: Detail of 'Skeletons Riding Bicycles' , 1986, by Saulo Moreno, Tlalpujahua, Michoacan, Mexico. Papier mache and wire (H 40cm).

Fig. 33: 'Newspaper vendors on a Bicycle ' by Saulo Moreno, Tlalpjahua, Michoacan, Mexico. Papier mache and wire (H 43cm). 'The Skeleton at the Feast' exhibition, Museum of Mankind 1991–1992.

Fig. 34: 'Skeletal Animal', by Saulo Moreno, Tlalpjahua, Michoacan, Mexico. Papier mache and wire (H 34cm). 'The Skeleton at the Feast' exhibition, Museum of Mankind 1991–1992.

Fig. 35: 'Mother with Child', 1987, by Deborah Schneebeli–Morrell. Cast papier mache figure painted with gesso and acrylic. (36 x 54cm). Cover of 'Crafts' no.92, May/June 1988.

masterly cocked and spiralled. The skeleton is mockingly smiling with its protruding tongue, in a ready position to prey on its victim. See how the far left leg is bent creating the illusion that the animal is about to pounce.

Quirkily extrovert, the figures all show a highly inventive use of papier mache.

CHAPTER FOUR

WHY HAS THE REVIVAL OF PAPIER MACHE COME ABOUT ?
—A DISCUSSION OF ITS INFLUENCES

The art and craft of creating objects from layers of pasted or pulped paper has been known since waste paper has been available, dating back 2,000 years. The diversity of its uses have appealed throughout history. Why, at the turn of the millennium, at a time when practically every material has been explored and invented are we turning to such an ancient and simple medium?

The papier mache 'taboo' of being a kindergarten material, has severely injured its credibility. Attitudes are slowly changing however, due to the magnificent work in papier mache being created by today's contemporary artists and because of the interest and range of traditional imported papier mache artefacts.

THE INFLUENCE OF MEXICAN PAPIER MACHE

Karen Kuykendall, author of 'Art and Design in Papier Mache', believes that the international revival has come about through this interest in Mexican papier mache, in traditional folk styles. (12,p.5) Deborah Schneebeli–Morrell has been directly inspired by the folk arts from the various parts of the world and particularly traditional dolls of Mexico. 'The Indian paganism mixed with Catholicism makes for a very vibrant art' she explains. (30,p.23) Schneebeli–Morrell never finished her diploma in fine art at Bath Academy. Instead, she

travelled around North America and Mexico from 1971 to 1972. On her journey she wrote to her tutor in England – 'this is much more of an education than art school'. (30,p.23) Schneebeli–Morrell is one of the first artists to begin working seriously with papier mache in the late 80's. Her work appeared on the cover of 'Crafts', in their May/June edition in 1988. (Fig:35) Previous to this date only two other artists had been mentioned in the magazine who were working with the medium, Julia Manheim and Jennie Neame. Schneebeli–Morrell has obviously been one of the founders of the mediums revival. Four years on, hundreds of artists and craftspeople are working with the medium.

In 1988, the Mexican 'Day of the Dead' exhibition was on view at the Serpentine Gallery, London. Schneebeli–Morrell was involved with a papier mache project associated with this exhibition. There was so much interest in this subject that last November, three years later, the British Museum's Department of Ethnography gathered another 'Day of the Dead' exhibition entitled 'The Skeleton at the Feast'. This exhibition has many more examples of Mexican traditional and contemporary papier mache work, compared to the catalogue of the previous exhibition. Could there be a growing interest of the medium in Mexico too?

I believe that the growing output of Mexican papier mache should be

Crafts

attributed to the current 'Ethnic Revival'. Dinah Hall claims that there is greater demand for traditional folk art/craft objects on a whole today, because people are travelling long haul more, they eat more exotic foods and are generally more globally influenced. (27,pp.46–48) Due to this interest many ethnic craft shops are selling artefacts from these countries. Mexico has proven to be one of these. Victor Lamont, director of the well known 'Global Village' (which has a branch in Dublin), does not believe this to be unhealthy. 'What is wrong' he explains 'is to create a fashionable market and then saturate it. Then appeal is quickly lost until another ten or so years. (27,p.47)

On the other extreme, 'Liberty', the world famous department store is cashing in on Mexican traditional papier mache artefacts by isolating them, giving the impression that they are extremely rare and fashionable and in turn placing ludicrous prices on them. They charge £125 for a hand sized papier mache skeleton. The store is creating an exclusive market for the wealthy, removing Mexican traditional crafts from their everyday existence among everyday people.

Todays artists are attracted to ancient arts and crafts of traditional peoples because there is a virtuous simplicity about them that reflects all aspects of their daily lives. To the early moderns this freedom was common knowledge,

such as Matisse –'you have to remain a child your whole life long and yet be a man who draws his energy from the things of the world'.[4]

EXPERIMENTATION WITH HANDEMADE PAPERS

The resurgence of papier mache seems to have been further encouraged by the revival of interest in handmade papers, particularly during the 70s. This stemmed from the active investigation of the materials with which artists were working. (25,p.6) Printmakers and painters began making their own paper and gradually the support for other media became the medium itself. About this time a great many handmade paper workshops sprang up all over Western Europe and America. Since then many artists have used paper pulp to create shapes and three dimensional forms. In effect they were using papier mache. From now on one will see that the fine artist tends to use the term 'paper pulp' and the craftsperson the term 'papier mache'.

AN ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY MEDIUM

Environmental issues are no longer the speciality of the scientific experts. Artists can no longer ignore the state of the world in which they live. The papier

mache revival has come about partly as a response to the general awareness of ecological imbalance. 'Recycling, seems at first glance, to offer an almost naively simple solution.'[5] However, by learning to reuse paper, we will have less waste to dispose of and less waste related pollution. Papier mache has been described as the 'Ultimate Recycled Art'. (31,p.151)(Fig:36)

> *At the present time, the integrity of using reclaimed materials has obvious appeal based on an awareness of the extent of world wastage of resources and a reluctance to add further to consumption. (25,p.8)*

Up until recently paper has been too readily abused and thrown away. The staggering production, not to say waste, of paper is huge. Twelve years ago, for instance, one edition of a Sunday newspaper used sixteen acres of forest. (20,p.15) The waste is much greater today, but this is only partly due to the increased number of consumers. One should not forget about the larger range of newspapers that are available, which are all too regularly accompanied by several supplements. Peter Rush in his book on papier mache reflects on this sheer waste through the poignant lines of Kahil Gabran. 'Trees are poems written against the sky which we fell to write our own emptiness on'.

'For better or worse —computers not withstanding —paper is fundamental to

PAPER WORK

Get stuck in to papier-mâché. Toni Rodgers reports on the art of pulp sculpting

The ultimate in recycled art, papier-mâché has been around since the second century. It came to Britain in the 18th century, when immigrant French workers were paid to chew paper cuttings to a pulp. Now, in this eco-centric age, it's enjoying a new-found vogue. Cost-effective artists have been quick to cash in on its conscience-salving appeal, producing an amazing array of techniques and form – no spit required. And for the amateur, it's an accessible, affordable and easy-to-produce means to an artistic end.

Winged pot, left, £55, by Juliette Pearce. For details tel (0273) 725321. Bowls, right, from £15 each, by Maureen Hamilton-Hill. Hand-painted and moulded flamingo wall plaque, below, £25, by Melinda White. Tel 071-582 0427

Handmade paper and silk are the trademarks of Maureen Hamilton-Hill, who uses tendrils of fuse wire to reinforce her eggshell-like bowls. For information, tel 071-586 2344.

Jewel-coloured silk *fronds are glued on to the flattest of papier-mâché plates by Carolyn Quartermaine. She then distresses, rusts, scratches and gilds them in her idiosyncratic style. Quartermaine turned to the immediacy of papier-mâché after she tired of painting and firing terracotta pots, and is currently working on a series of large decorative shields. For information and stockists contact Quartermaine on 081-961 8800.*

For the ultimate how-to book, buy *The Art And Craft Of Papier Mâché* by Juliet Bawden (Mitchell Beazley, £14.95). Chapters are devoted to techniques, decoration, interiors, fashion, masks, dolls and creations, and each is illustrated with pieces by some of the best contemporary papier-mâché artists.

Useful tips include layering the paper on in different directions, or alternating with pink newsprint so that you can tell which layer you're working on. Inspirational as well as informative, this is a tome that no embryonic pulper should be without.

STILL LIFES ALASTAIR LAIDLAW

Pulp sculptors ***par excellence*** **Papier Phantastique take some beating when it comes to eccentricity. With a garden shredder, food processor and newspapers, Gus and Sandra Tun turn their hands to any number of items. 'We call them "interior accessories" because they are artistic as well as functional,' explains Sandra. Their church loft studio is crammed with objects, ranging from moulded calculators and telephones clustered with gaudy cherubs and baubles to sculptured wall pockets for plants. Influenced by Gus' childhood in Burma, elaborate candlesticks and mirrors are painted in blazing crimson, purple and aquamarine. Their work sells at Paul Smith and Liberty, and they take commissions: tel 081-299 0209.**

MARTINA HALL

Silk, gold leaf and papier-mâché plates, far left, £180 each, by Carolyn Quartermaine. Bird clock, left, £120, by Papier Phantastique

Fig. 36: 'Design Notebook', 'ELLE' magazine, May 1991, p.151.

the development and continuance of modern society' (21,p.5) But we also need to realize that waste paper is a resource in itself. If one looks to the past, one can learn from previous generations. Traditional craft countries have not turned immediately to the art and craft of papier mache because of their environmental consciousness. Theirs is an old tradition, going back many centuries, which instinctively evolved out of a surplus of waste and a want to recycle.

Shirley Spaulding DeVoe, an expert historian on papier mache, supports this idea – 'there can be little doubt that the Oriental pulp products were made of waste paper, just like they were in later Europe'. (5,p.6)

The people of the 19th century were forerunners of todays recycled newspaper logs. At the time dried compressed pulp balls were used for the kindling of fires and furnaces. (5,p.22) Doll makers of the Nurnberg area, Germany, were the first to utilize waste from mills in the early 19th century. (1,p.15) Most contemporary papier mache artists use salvaged materials, such as newspaper, corrugated card and computer paper. Deborah Schneebeli–Morell raids skips to provide the cardboard for the basic structures of her 'shrine' like icons. She also uses newsprint preferring the Financial Times, 'a very superior paper', for the curved surfaces of her models. (29,p.16) She also expresses a

preference for non toxic pastes and paints.

'Currently there is a huge environmental approach in the whole design process, in the fields of architecture, interior design and product design, packaging, print, graphics and textiles'. (15,p.96)
Possibly, the use of existing papier mache trinket boxes from India, which are extremely cheap, well made and beautiful objects in their own right, could be used for packaging of small goods, such as jewellery or perfume. This should be investigated, as a similar project is being carried out successfully by the 'Body Shop', under the 'Trade not Aid' policy, in which beautifully handmade papers from Nepal are being sold as gift bags.

These all add up towards helping ethnic and developing countries towards self sufficiency and a restored environment. It supports the move away from mass production and there is the added bonus of the customer purchasing a recycled product.

THE ROLE OF THE CRAFTSPERSON

The desire to look away from mass production originated in the 70's. One of the reasons for this was the 'Pop Artists' preoccupation with mass consumerism which began to seem unattractive. This was partly due to the fact that the

environment was increasingly at risk from industrial processes. The crafts, therefore, began to offer a means of escape. At the same time, a hunger for physical virtuosity in the handling of materials came about, something which many artists were no longer happy to provide. The result was a renewed fascination in the role of the artist/craftsman. (14,p.274) He became a culture hero. Today the appeal is still growing, giving the craftsperson more credibility and confidence to work in the medium. Which is necessary, because craft purists are feeling some discomfort with papier mache. 'It does not occupy a niche and it does not nestle safely within tradition'. (29,p.18)

THE ROLE OF WOMEN

Is it coincidence that the majority of papier mache artists are women ?
In the recent successful 'Paper Show' exhibition at the Oriel Moyston Gallery, Llandudno, Wales in 1990, nine out of the ten contributors were women. The curator, Sarah Roberts, attributes this to the light non-industrial qualities of the medium and need for few or no tools for its manipulation, lending itself to domestic situations. (25,p.10)

However, this is not the only explanation. If we look back to the 70's, once again, women artists had turned to decorative and pattern painting in the making of

feminist statements. Such as Joyce Kozloff and Miriam Schapiro. They were researching the decorative crafts done by the thousands of anonymous women of previous generations and cultures. They wanted to highlight the strength and decorativeness of these crafts, which were carried out by women exclusively.[6] The women artists believed that these crafts had been taken for granted for too long and deserved a significance of their own. 'Historically, the creative energy of women which they had been unable to use in painting and sculpture, had often flowed into the category of "craft"'. 'The crafts had never been sexist', believes Edward Lucie-Smith. (14,p275) That decorative movement had filled a vacuum. Such a vacuum was present until the revival of papier mache by women during the latter the half of 1980s.

Deborah Schneebeli-Morrell, one of the revivalists, cleverly merges her ideas with the papier mache technique. Her interest in folk art, from various parts of the world, is connected to the human psyche.(30,p.23) Like Mexican folk art and the papier mache 'Ganesha's' by the women of Madhubani, India, the role of symbolism is very important to her. In the completely diverse environments and societies of India and England, Deborah Schneebeli-Morrell and the Madhubani women appear to have the same ideas and medium of expression. Domestic woman as the mother figure, is the theme emerging from their work.

Schneebeli–Morrell desperately wants to prove that 'domesticity does not exclude intellectual life'. (30,p.23)

In Pamela Johnsons article 'Alchemists', (29,pp.16–18) we are informed that Deborah Schneebeli–Morrell and fellow papier mache artist Julie Arkell openly share a dislike for the elitism of the fine art world, reinforcing their passion for folk art, where art is so rooted in everyday life.

Julie Arkell stresses that she carries out her work 'with as much struggle and wanting as any painter working on a canvas...I'm pushing all the time to extend a visual vocabulary. My work is about the joy of imagery and colour', like that of folk art, 'I don't think that trivial'. (29,p.18) These artists at the start of the revival, in the late 80's, were obviously struggling to gain credibility and recognition.

ALCHEMY

An overlooked and underestimated feature of the medium is the ability to make something beautiful out of something ugly or of no value. This is certainly one of the most magical characteristics of the medium. Papier mache artists are essentially investing waste material with new significance and meaning. The creative act is most powerful and pleasurable and can only be parred with the satisfaction of the

alchemic process. 'There is something magical about making a beautiful precious object from a substance of no intrinsic value. I get extraordinary pleasure out of this transformation', explains Deborah Schneebeli–Morrell. (29,p.16)

More and more papier mache is being applied to old or damaged products giving them a new lease of life and a totally new appearance, at a very low cost. Old fashioned furniture such as chairs, frames or presses can be restyled giving a modern more agreeable look. This combined with the sophisticated use of modern materials, like automobile enamels for giving perfect and durable finishes, is an excellent example of combining the best of the old with the best of the new.

IMPROVED MATERIALS

The amazing number of technical developments and refinements of papier mache's essential components, such as pigments, acrylic paints, improved adhesives, polyeurathanes, resins and the vast range of paper itself has significantly added to the mediums recent appeal. These materials enable papier mache to possess chameleon like qualities. It has the capability to imitate the visual appearance of other materials such as wood, stone, clay or metal. (8,p.8) It can be worked roughly emphasizing the nature of the material or

it can be used to create highly intricate shapes on a miniature scale. 'The fusion of traditional materials with new ones has given rise to wonderful things in the field of Mexican papier mache'. (2,p.132)

The medium has been elevated to the status of a fresh and exciting art form, rediscovered by artists eager to find a new creative means of expression for their work.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE WORK OF DEBORAH SCHNEEBELI–MORRELL

Deborah Schneebeli–Morrell studied fine art in 1969, but after two years abandoned this to travel the U.S. and Mexico. Back in England, marriage and motherhood followed and it was the next fifteen years of being a wife and mother and suffering mental and physical crises that became the education out of which has emerged her stunning and original work. She now sees this illness as 'supremely creative. If you deny your creativity it will create something else inside of you', she explains. (30, p.23)

Two dimensional painting was, for her, too limiting as a form. She began to realize that it was just as important to make the form on which she painted and turned to ceramics. Becoming increasingly frustrated with the limitations of clay as a medium, she tried various techniques to try and achieve more direct colourful and vibrant effects. She then began to develop her ideas using papier mache and found that she responded to the freshness and flexibility of the medium. Papier mache is, by and large, free of technical constraints. 'Having no rules or technical knowledge to fall back on is very freeing, but also quite a challenge'. (29., p.16)

Deborah Schneebeli–Morrell recreates traditional Mexican peasant dolls interpreting them with more sophisticated

techniques. (Fig:37) She delights in emphasizing the lightness of the material by using fresh and bright colours, non toxic, of course. The dolls are made by the layering technique and have a deliberate primitive quality about them. There is a suggestion of folk art conveyed by the bulky forms and bright colours. Although the forms are simple the workmanship is meticulous. The earthy little characters are directly inspired by the traditional papier mache dolls made today by rural Mexicans.

At first Schneebeli–Morrell's models were technically unrefined, she would simply model a sheet of glue–soaked newspaper. However, she quickly learned that she had to gain more control over her medium and consequently developed a casting technique. Using sculptors' plasticine she models the forms and coats them with twelve layers of newspaper and glue. The shape is then cut from the mould. This results in a much more durable piece and the modelling stage provides a more controlled deliberate form, enabling her to make lots of editions from the same mould. (29.p.16) She achieves the finish by applying several layers of gesso, a combination of whiting and animal glue, which smoothes out some of the rougher bits of the mould creating an ideal surface to paint on.

Painting is the most challenging part of the craft. She is comfortable when

Fig. 37: 'Articulated Doll' by Deborah Schneebeli–Morrell. Cast papier mache figure painted with gesso and acrylic. (H 26cm).

crafting, but explains 'Painting something three dimensional presents a different set of demands than a two dimensional painting. You have to enhance an existing image'. (30,p.23) Though, eventually the pieces are very directly painted, it is after many tests that the results prove rewarding.

But technique is only a means to an end. Her shrine like wall pieces or 'domestic icons' usually contain a key figure, similar to her articulated folk dolls, attended by a range of symbols. These are either fishes, oak leaves, hands, flames, animals or children. She uses the box shape to contain her idea which is 'an articulation of the spiritual development that has come out of her daily life'. (29,p.16) 'If I feel political about anything it is that being a mother has been devalued' are the words in which she sums up her deeply rooted emotions. 'Roll on the day when we can put on a C.V., five years childbearing and it will count'. (30,p.23) Her work is about recognizing that experience and the knowledge derived from it.

Although very personal, the subjects are universal and fundamental, growth, fertility, creativity and the inner world. Schneebeli-Morrell now uses papier mache to fix the images which were coming out of her psychotherapy - 'In the sessions I always saw things in visual terms. In order to unravel something I needed a metaphor to express it, sometimes they were so clear in my

mind that I had to give them substance'. (30,p.23)

Deborah Schneebeli–Morrell's father is Lithuanian, not surprisingly, this has also been of influence to her work. Ancient religion of this region was to do with goddesses and their worship. 'My pieces are goddesses in a way'. (30,p.23) They have a literary equivalent in magical realism. The wise goddesses are serious, not gloomy, and have found resonance with many woman. The goddesses give women a sense of spiritual strength.

The exuberant piece of work entitled 'Integrated Woman with Flower Urns' (Fig:38) is about a woman in whom the masculine and feminine are integrated. The fish, which occurs throughout her work, in this piece represents masculinity and the worlds failure to recognize the importance of domesticity and motherhood. It is a hopeful piece, since woman confidently holds the fish in her arms, she is in control. It is a formalized picture contained within an intricate frame which itself becomes part of the picture. This icon in the form of a triptych is celebrating the under–standing that has come to woman. The element of growth is portrayed in the flower filled urns. The sculpted figure and plants are, once again, painted brightly and the frame of paper and cardboard is inlaid with precious gold leaf exaggerating its new significance.

Fig. 38: 'Integrated Woman With Flower Urns' by Deborah Schneebeli-Morrell. Cast and constructed papier mache. (H 60cm).

The central figure and flaming urns in 'Sun God' (Fig:39) are symbols of the life force. These symbols also refer to the myth of Apollo, the sun god, in which the water nymph metamorphosed into a sunflower, turning her head from east to west everyday, following the path of his travels. The figure holds a sunflower aloft symbolizing desire, confidence and simplicity.

'Three Part Invention', (Fig:40) a poetic papier mache sculpture, could almost be mistaken for a Mexican papier mache toy. The artist was listening to Bach's 'Three Part Inventions' while working on the piece. Symbolically, the three elements are loosely related. The strength of woman is emphasized by being placed between the free spirit of the bird and the strength and virility of the (male) horse.

Schneebeli–Morrell's use of symbolism together with a vibrant colour means that though these pieces are deter–minedly about women's experience through domesticity and motherhood, they are not 'kitchen sink', they work on several levels. (29,p.16) Deborah Schneebeli–Morrell is constantly developing her vocabulary and a language to express her insights and realizations. The 'domestic icons' are touchstones encapsulating the importance of the role of woman, a truly undervalued role.

Fig. 39: 'Sun God' by Deborah Schneebeli–Morrell. Cast and constructed papier mache. (H 65cm).

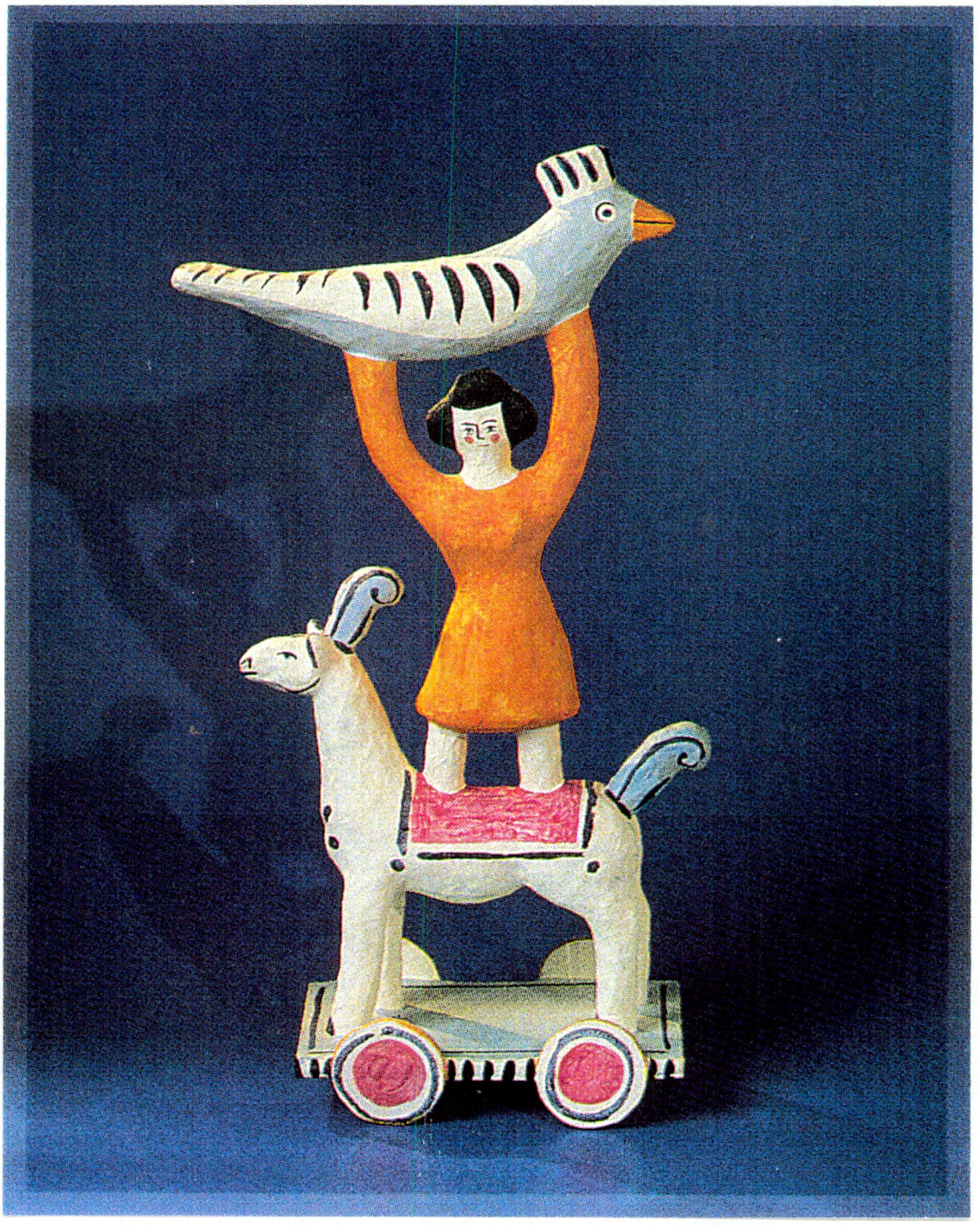

Fig. 40: 'Three Part Invention' by Deborah Schneebeli-Morrell. Cast papier mache. (H 52cm).

CONCLUSION

In this age of plenty, the age of disposability, it seems that there is little we value. Partly, this must be due to the rapid change and impermanance of our Western culture. It is not until now, with the impact of the energy crisis and the general awareness and concern for our endangered environment, that we have begun to look at all that we have taken for granted. The new found respect for papier mache is an intuitive reaction against our increasingly technological world.

The age of folk art/craft is near gone. However, it is obvious that the folk art traditions of Mexico are alive and healthy. We have seen how strong the method of using waste paper as an artform has flourished and continues to grow. Mexico has been confidently working with the medium for over 100 years. It is the magical environment of the country, that has conditioned and cultivated the use of the medium.

During the 18th and 19th centuries the medium enjoyed a brief existence. Its decline was due to industrialisation. Papier mache needs the art and skill of the artist/craftsman to reveal its true virtues, whether he be European or Mexican. Mexican papier mache artists understand that art lies in the creative act. The difference between them and us

is that they are unconcerned whether their work is carried out with a brush or stone, or canvas it is not the tool that counts, but the expression of art as an everyday gift.

> 'what sets worlds in motion is the interplay of differences, their attractions and repulsions. Life is plurality, death is uniformity. By suppressing differences and peculiarities, by eliminating different civilizations and cultures, progress weakens life and favours death. The ideal of a single civilization for everyone, implicit in the cult of progress and technique impoverishes and mutilates us. Every view of the world that becomes extinct, every culture that disappears, diminishes a possibility of life'. – Octavio Paz.

FOOTNOTES

1. Sukey Hughes,'Washi–The world of Japanese Paper'., Japan, Kodanasha Internal Ltd., 1978; quoted in Mingei International Museum of World Folk Arts, 'Paper Innovations', San Francisco, 1985, p.20.

2. President Porfirio Diaz held office between 1876–1880 and again from 1884 to 1911. The latter period became known as the *Porfiriato.* During the government of Porfirio Diaz, Jose Guadalupe Posada became the master of the 'Calavera'.

3. Meyer and Sherman: 1979; quoted from Elizabeth Carmichael and Chloe Sayer 'The Skeleton at the Feast', London, British Museum Press, 1991, p.148.

4. Volkmar Essers, 'Matisse– Master of Colour', Colonge, Kolnische Verlagsdruckerei GmbH, 1987, p.89.

5. Suzi Gablik, ' Art in the Age of Ecology', Resurgence, no.147, July/August 1991.

6. Corinne Robins, 'The Pluralist Era–American Art, 1968–1981', New York, Harper & Row Publishers Ltd., 1984, chapter 5 – 'Pattern Painting and Decorative Art', p.132.

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