

Hemispheres

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All the News at's Fit to Woodprint

Decades before Twitter and Facebook Live, Mexican Modernists were inventing citizen journalism

art history Opening this month at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, *Paint the Revolution: Mexican Modernism, 1910-1950* is being called the most comprehensive collection of Mexican Modernist art shown in the U.S. in seven decades. The exhibit showcases an era when Mexico's most prominent artists, such as Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo, used their works to bear witness to historical events and express political views.

"The whole idea of Mexican art in Modernism is to activate people and make them aware," says project assistant curator Mark A. Castro. "These artists perceived themselves as workers, invested in shaping society for the better."

One of the exhibit's surprising highlights is a small group of prints that are among the earliest depictions of the horrors of Nazi Germany. Long before the international press got its hands on photos of the atrocities, European political exiles joined forces with a collective of American and Mexican artists called *Taller de Gráfica Popular* to create 1943's *The Black Book of Nazi Terror*. One print, *Deportation to Death*, by Leopoldo Méndez, depicts soldiers inspecting train cars filled with people being



shipped off to a concentration camp—perhaps the first published depiction of the Holocaust—while his wood engraving *The Vengeance of the People* (pictured) shows an ax-wielding man attacking the cowering figures of Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini.

"Once they escaped, rather than do nothing, they began to vocalize and document these horrors," Castro says. "In one way, [The Black Book] is a small angle within the exhibit, but in another way, it is representative of this

entire trend, which is that artisans felt that they had to activate people to fight oppression." For instance, American expat Robert Mallery's 1942 lithograph *This Is the Nazi New Order*, which prominently featured a cross-wearing man being executed by the Nazis, was used as pro-war propaganda.

"These artists created art to provoke the changes that they wanted to see," Castro says. "They felt that there was a responsibility to do that—for art to do that." —STEPHANIE CITRON (OCT. 25)