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FRIDA KAHLO
DIEGO RIVERA
& MEXICAN
MODERNISM
THE JACQUES AND NATASHA GELMAN COLLECTION

DENVER
art
MUSEUM

HIGH
SCHOOL

FACILITATOR
GUIDE

ART AND SOCIAL CHANGE

INSPIRED BY:

The History of Mexico by Diego Rivera.

TOPIC:

Identify the role of murals and artists after the Mexican Revolution as Mexico was building its unified national identity; make connections to the role art plays within other political or social contexts.

RATIONALE:

Art has had numerous functions throughout its history, making its purpose and role complex and difficult to restrict to any single concept. Analyzing the role of art and artists in society across time creates relevance in learning about art, thus motivating learners, and expands the importance of art.

RESOURCES INCLUDE:

FOR FACILITATORS:

- A How-to facilitate guide including information about the role muralism played post-Mexican Revolution, directions and sample prompting conversation questions. Guide includes complementary links for background research, and an activity extension with a video connecting to the Chicana/Chicano movement in Colorado.
- High resolution images of the artwork
- Two student worksheets
- History of Mexico Mural Venn Diagram note catcher
- Art and Social Change Worksheet

FOR KIDS:

- History of Mexico Mural Note Catcher
- Art and Social Change Worksheet

[VIEW IMAGES HERE](#)

PLEASE NOTE:

This mural is called different titles for different sections. For this lesson we will refer to it as *The History of Mexico*.

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Muralists such as Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco had an important role in making revolutionary and nationalist ideals visible in the years following the Mexican Revolution, 1910–1920. This coincided with the United Mexican States (Mexico’s official name) emerging as a constitutional republic—that is, having a government with democratically elected representatives/officials and the rule of law.

Artists forged a new visual language by creating large-scale murals that combined pre-Hispanic traditions, colonial histories, and modern values.

Mexican modernism is a movement that combined social realism and surrealistic imagery

in paintings and murals that shaped Mexico’s cultural heritage. The Mexican modernism movement drew inspiration from ancient artworks from pre-Hispanic cultures such as molded vessels, ceramic figurines, and stepped pyramid temples. These artworks then combined these ideas/visuals with modernized images such as the fascination with abstraction and geometric shapes, most coming from Cubism (An art

movement characterized by fragmented subject matter deconstructed in such a way that it can be viewed from multiple angles simultaneously).

These mural artists depicted the landscape as a place of sacred beauty and ancestral memory, which reflected Indigenous, precolonial traditions. The murals also engaged with social and political issues and often united the people in a call to action, such as creating land reform that restored land to the Indigenous people. Muralists addressed both heroic and tragic histories in vibrant, large-scale works that were intended to instill optimism and pride.

[DETAILED IMAGES LINK](#)

Visit Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and Mexican Modernism exhibition at the Denver Art Museum, and you will see a reproduction of another mural by Diego Rivera titled: Man, Controller of the Universe.

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CONVERSATION QUESTIONS:

What might the call to action be in *History of Mexico*?

ARTWORK LINK

Where do you see tragic histories depicted?

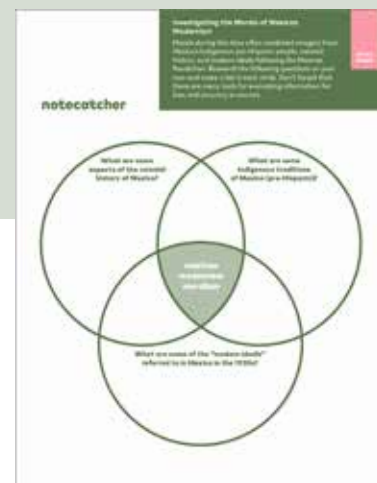
What parts of this artwork seem to celebrate Mexico's Indigenous past? The Indigenous people in Mexico are those whose lands and freedoms were taken over by the Spanish during its colonization period (1510–1810).

What parts of this mural depict everyday life?

In what parts of the mural do you see optimism or pride? Are there aspects depicting aspiration for the future?

After viewing and discussing *History of Mexico*, use this note catcher to guide your research into the histories that contribute to the understanding of the Mexican muralism movement. Murals during this time often combined imagery from Mexico's colonial history, Indigenous pre-Hispanic Mexico, and modern ideals. Don't forget that there are many tools for evaluating information for bias and accuracy in sources. It is important to consider the source of the information (author, publisher) and their credibility, and the characteristics of the story, including purpose, accuracy, and audience. Here is a **helpful tool** for determining whether or not to use a source.

NOTE CATCHER



DIG DEEPER (helpful links)

- [Oxford Art Journal | Revolution as Ritual: Diego Rivera's National Palace Mural](#)
- [History and The Arts | The History of Mexico](#)
- [Daily Motion | Diego Rivera Mural in National Palace](#)
- [Bluffton University | Digital Imaging Project](#)

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graphic organizer

DIRECTIONS:
Research Mexican artists before the national identity quest continues in the 1920s. What roles do artists play in social change today?
Research today's contemporary artists who participate in social change and write your notes below.

ARTWORK	ARTIST AND CONTEXT	ROLE OF THE ARTWORK
Make a slide of 1-2 paragraphs about the artwork here.	Who made the artwork? What is their role in society? Under what conditions?	What role did the artwork play in the lives of the artist(s)? How did it help or hinder social change? How did it help or hinder the lives of the artist(s)?

☺-☺-☺-☹ **YOUR TURN:**

Use the following worksheet for kids to make connections between the role the Mexican modernists played post-revolution in defining national identity, the role Coloradan Chicano/a muralists played in the 1960's and the role artists play today! After kids have identified artists participating in social change in their note catcher, have everyone present contemporary artworks, their corresponding role within social change, and why they were drawn to the artwork in a fast-paced PechaKucha-style presentation. PechaKucha, Japanese for "chit chat," is a storytelling protocol that is a modern-day equivalent of show-and-tell. The idea originated with presenting 20 images on slides and limiting your talking to 20 seconds per slide. Adjust the rules of the format to fit your needs.

NEED A PLACE TO START?

Here are a few (of the many!) examples of contemporary artists playing a part in social change today!

ARTISTS LOCAL TO COLORADO:

Birdseed Collective, Mario Echevarria, Carlota Espinoza, El Centro Su Teatro, Thomas "Detour" Evans, Jerry Jaramillo, Stevon Lucero, Bob Luna, Emanuel Martinez, Sylvia Montero, Adri Norris, Patty Ortiz, Tara Rynders, Carlos Santistevan, Danielle SeeWalker, Suzi Q Smith, Leo Tanguma Frankie Toan, The Worst Crew, Lindee Zimmer.

ARTISTS YOU CAN FIND ON DENVER ART MUSEUM WEBSITE:

Tya Anthony, Mark Bradford, Jordan Casteel, Zhang Dali, Gregg Deal, Ana Teresa Fernández, Carloz Frésquez, Ramiro Gomez, Erika Harrsch, Suchitra Mattai, Shirin Neshat, Tony Ortega, Virgil Ortiz, Lorna Simpson, Fred Wilson, Xiaoze Xie.

ADDITIONAL ARTISTS:

Tania Bruguera, Theaster Gates, Eytayo Tolulope Ijisakin, Luke Jerram, Adam Frelin and architect Barbara Nelson, Mary Mattingly, Pedro Reyes, Favianna Rodriguez, Ai Weiwei

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ACTIVITY EXTENSION:

Explore the role Chicano/Chicana muralism played in Colorado history

Latino/Latina Coloradans have long used murals as a way to celebrate and share culture, and in the 1960s and 70s, murals played a role in the El Movimiento Chicano Movement. El Movimiento, a civil rights movement emerged in Denver during the early 1960's when Mexican American and Mexican communities within Colorado took back their power by reclaiming their Indigenous roots, history and human rights. The struggle for equality was waged on many fronts – in fields and factories, in schools, through alternative media, and in the arts.

The most famous Colorado Chicano artist, Emanuel Martínez, created the famous Mestizo Head as well as dozens of murals, sculptures, and posters. He continues to create sculptures and other works from his studio in Morrison, Colorado. In an article in CU Boulder Today, Lucha Martinez de Luna, director of the Chicano Murals of Colorado Project stated, "The mural tradition is a distinct Colorado aesthetic that developed to proudly depict the cultural heritage of historically marginalized communities, while

DIG DEEPER *(helpful links)*

-  [History Colorado](#)
-  [Chicano Murals of Colorado](#)
-  [Mural article](#)

creating a sense of place in the urban and rural landscape, says Martinez. Fifty years ago, the state was on the forefront of a nationwide art movement, but due to the lack of support from local cultural institutions, then and today, the relevance of Chicana/o muralism in Colorado continues to be devalued. "

Just as activists and artists influenced a generation of Latino/Latina Coloradans in the 1960's and 70's artists today, including those right here in Colorado, are inspiring people to get involved in the social discourse.

CONVERSATION QUESTIONS:

What are the similarities and differences between the Mexican muralists and Colorado's muralist movement?

How can we combat these core issues that still exist today?

How might you honor or celebrate Latinx culture in your own way?

What are some other forms of art as activism that you see in our community?

