

June 12, 2006

**Contact:**

Sandra Farish Sloan, 415.357.4174, ssloan@sfmoma.org  
Libby Garrison, 415.357.4177, lgarrison@sfmoma.org  
Robyn Wise, 415.357.4172, rwise@sfmoma.org

**SFMOMA PRESENTS**  
**Mexico as Muse: Tina Modotti and Edward Weston**

From September 2, 2006, through January 2, 2007, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (SFMOMA) will present the exhibition *Mexico as Muse: Tina Modotti and Edward Weston*. The exhibition is organized by Sandra S. Phillips, senior curator of photography at SFMOMA.

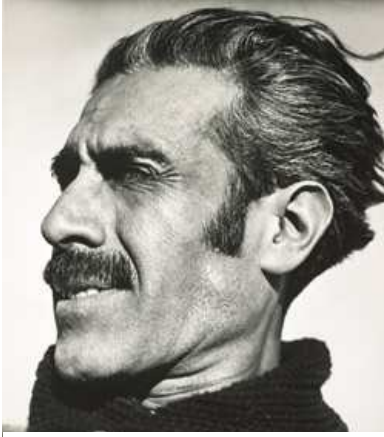
For five years in the 1920s, two of the major figures in 20<sup>th</sup> century art, Tina Modotti and Edward Weston, shared a passionate partnership. They also shared a love for Mexico, where they lived and worked together from 1923 until 1926, each making pictures of astonishing beauty and ambition. This exhibition presents 89 photographs created during their time together in Mexico, images that count among the most memorable from each artist's career, demonstrating the pair's uncompromising standards for their medium. Also included in the exhibition are a variety of archival materials—letters, postcards, photographs, and ephemera—sent to members of Modotti's family, which will allow viewers to compare everyday uses of photography in Modotti and Weston's lives, in books, as postcards, and in newspapers with celebrated examples of their photographic art.



Tina Modotti, *Untitled (feet in sandals)*, undated; Collection SFMOMA, purchased through a gift of the Art Supporting Foundation, Launny Steffens, Sandra Lloyd, Shawn and Brook Byers, Mr. and Mrs. George F. Jewett Jr., and anonymous donors

Modotti and Weston came from radically different backgrounds, yet each was an important catalyst in the other's artistic development. Born in Italy in 1896, Modotti had received little formal education before immigrating to San Francisco to join the rest of her family in 1913. She worked as a seamstress and an actress in the local Italian theater, then moved with her husband, the artist Robo de Richey, to Los Angeles, where they became members of a burgeoning community of bohemian artists, poets, and socialists. In Los Angeles in 1921 Modotti met and began a romantic relationship with Weston, a fashionable portrait photographer with an ambition to make art. In December of 1921, inspired by reports of great social change, a newly stable government, and a reverence for artists as catalysts for reform and growth in the wake of the Mexican Revolution, de Richey moved to Mexico City. When Modotti joined him there a few months later, she discovered him dying of smallpox. She remained in Mexico after his death to organize an exhibition of de Richey's work but moved back to the United States shortly thereafter. Determined to return to Mexico, she relocated once again in 1923—this time with Weston as her companion.

*more*



Edward Weston, *Galvan Shooting (Manuel Hernandez Galvan, Mexico)*, 1924; Collection SFMOMA, Albert M. Bender Collection, Albert M. Bender Bequest Fund purchase; © Center for Creative Photography, Arizona Board of Regents

Modotti spoke fluent Spanish, and she managed her and Weston's successful portrait studio, where they photographed Mexican citizens, artists, writers, and revolutionaries. He learned about the adventurous avant-garde circles in Mexico through her interest in art and politics, while she learned the craft of photography from him, adapting his large camera and platinum process for her own needs. Photography became her livelihood, and she described it as "the most eloquent, the most direct means for fixing, for registering, the present epoch." In 1926 she bought and began using a handheld Graflex camera, which provided her with more mobility. Many of the photographs featured in *Mexico as Muse* are Graflex pictures she sent to her mother-in-law.

Weston and Modotti occupy an important place in the history of photography. Both were deeply affected by their life in Mexico, inspired by the artistic activity and social optimism that stemmed from an emphasis on indigenous people and ancient culture as key to the reawakening of the country.

Weston's pictures of ancient pyramids, earthen pots, and palm tree trunks approach pure abstract form, while photographs such as his stark and spiky Maguey cactus and the hand of Galvan holding a handcrafted pot refer to the continuing vitality and relevance of Mexican culture.

Modotti, meanwhile, discovered cubist structure in adobe churches, taut telephone wires, and a stream of peasant sombreros parading beneath a window. More personal than Weston's pictures, hers are also less idealized and abstracted. She explored the still life as a photographic genre, taking pictures that serve as both documentary records and potent cultural symbols. Her photographs of Mexico's indigenous and impoverished people showcase her devotion to the promise of economic and social justice, and they became icons of revolutionary Mexico, much in the way Rivera's murals did.

In 1926 Weston returned to California, but Modotti adopted Mexico as her homeland, remaining there until 1930, when her involvement in Communism precipitated her deportation to Berlin. Modotti went back to Mexico in 1939 (escaping the Spanish Civil War), going first to New York and then to Mexico, under the pseudonym Maria, before gaining political asylum in Mexico in 1941. She died there of a heart attack in 1942.

On Friday, October 27, at noon in the Koret Visitor Education Center (KVEC), SFMOMA will present an Art and Conversation program, featuring Tina Modotti biographer Patricia Albers, to accompany the exhibition. The program is free with gallery admission. Also, throughout the run of the exhibition, *Tina in Mexico*, a film by Brenda Longfellow, will be shown daily (except Wednesdays) at 2:30 pm and, between September 18 and October 31, on Thursdays at 7 pm in KVEC. Additional information is available on the Museum's Web site at [www.sfmoma.org](http://www.sfmoma.org).

\* \* \*

**Museum hours:** Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:45 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:45 p.m. Summer hours (Memorial Day to Labor Day): Open at 10 a.m. Closed Wednesdays and the following public holidays: New Year's Day, Fourth of July, Thanksgiving, Christmas. The Museum is open the Wednesday between Christmas and New Year's Day.

**Koret Visitor Education Center:** Open daily (except Wednesdays): 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.; open late Thursdays, until 8:30 p.m. Summer hours: Open at 10 a.m.

**Admission prices:** Adults \$12.50; seniors \$8; students \$7. SFMOMA members and children 12 and under are admitted free. Thursday evenings after 6 p.m. admission is half-price. The first Tuesday of each month admission is free.

SFMOMA is easily accessible by Muni, BART, Golden Gate Transit, SamTrans, and Caltrain. Hourly, daily, and monthly parking is available at the SFMOMA Garage at 147 Minna Street. For parking information, call 415.348.0971.

**Visit our Web site at [www.sfmoma.org](http://www.sfmoma.org) or call 415.357.4000 for more information.**

The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art is a private, nonprofit institution supported by its members, individual contributors, corporations, foundations, and government agencies. Major annual support is provided by the Koret Foundation Funds and Grants for the Arts/San Francisco Hotel Tax Fund. KidstART free admission for children 12 and under is made possible by Charles Schwab & Co., Inc. Thursday evening half-price admission is sponsored by Banana Republic.

# # #