

TINA MODOTTI AND THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

There is a new play off Broadway entitled "MODOTTI" which is described as "an amateurish portrayal" of Tina Modotti who was a revolutionary activist and world class ("the greatest unknown in the 20th century") photographer who had a symbiotic and romantic relationship with Edward Weston. At the same time a comprehensive retrospective of her work is being exhibited in Vienna at Kunst Haus Wien who name her "one of the most fascinating woman of the 20th century" (see attached link)

A close friend of Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, she had several husbands not all of them (including Frida's Diego) her own. Truly more of a revolutionary than Frida she was the favorite model for Rivera's murals and Weston's photos.

In the movie "FRIDA" Tina was played by Ashley Judd. If the movie "TINA" comes about, and I hope it does, Judd would be my nominee for the role. On May 27 she received a masters degree in public administration from Harvard; then three days later joined her husband, Dario Franchitti, in Indianapolis as he claimed his second trophy for winning the INDY 500.

For reasons I have never been able to explain (even to myself) the role of the women in the Mexican Revolution--a unique phenomenon in history-- has always been a subject of interest to me. On November 20 this year the Revolution (always spelled with a capital "R") will mark its 100th anniversary. Hopefully, I will finally find the time and make the effort to discuss and demonstrate the subject in greater length by then.

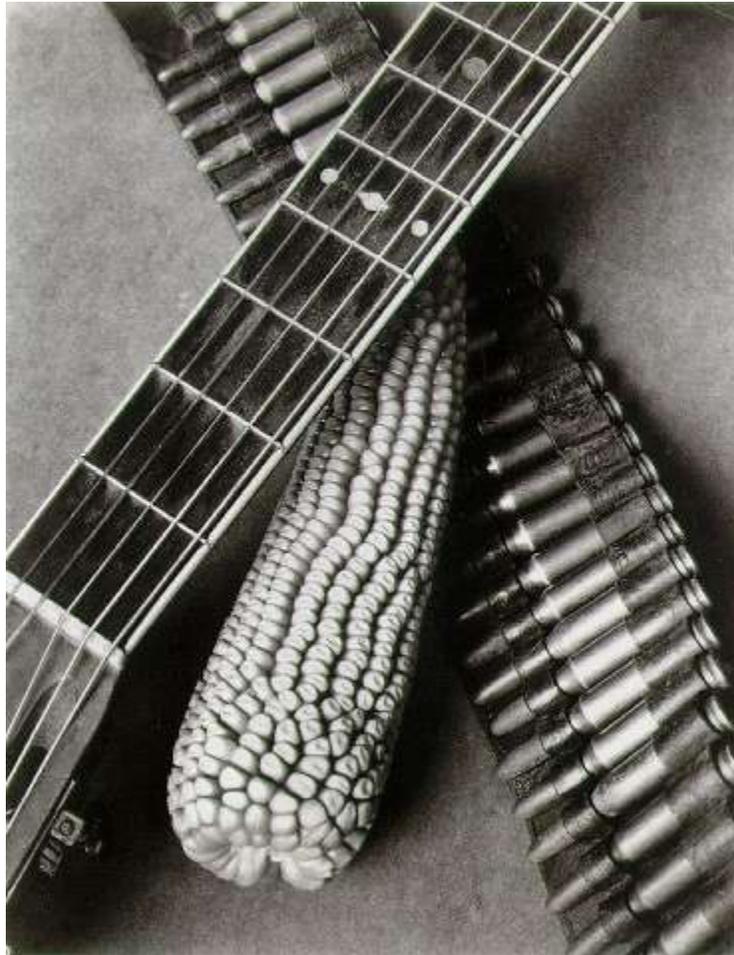
At least a million lives were lost in the Mexican Revolution in a nation whose population then numbered only 15 million. We consistently mourn (and with justification) the loss of 600,000 lives in our own civil war when our nation's population was 35 million. There are other interesting comparisons but among them is the uniquely different role performed by thousands of women.

One of Tina Modotti's famous (in Mexico) photographs is the one shown below in that it summarizes indeed epitomizes what women did and meant to the Revolution. This does not mean that Tina intended this interpretation:

CORN represents food which Mexican women cooked and prepared, foraged for, and would often steal. The armies of the Revolution had no commissaries; women filled that gap. The armies could not subsist without them.

The BANDOLIER represents the military role of tens of thousands of Mexican women who fought and who often led troops of men and women into battle. Some became generals. Several were colonels.

The GUITAR reminds us that all of the music of the Revolution is about women: "Adelita" (the national anthem of the Revolution), "La Valentina" and "La Cucaracha" are all songs about women. If the lyrics seem frivolous in this revolutionary context just remember Hemingway's reminder (about another war) that "men marched to their death while singing them". "Lorena" was an equivalent song in our own civil war.



Tina Modotti
Bandolier, corn, guitar
1927