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About the Artist: Graciela Iturbide

Graciela Iturbide (Mexico City, 1942) is one of Mexico’s outstanding contemporary photographers, and internationally recognized for her expositions. Over a four-decade career she has built an oeuvre that is intense and deeply singular, fundamental for understanding the development of contemporary photography in Mexico and the rest of Latin America. Her contribution and talent have been recognized with many honors, including the W. Eugene Smith prize for photography (1987), France’s Mois de la Photo (1988), a Guggenheim fellowship (1988), and the recent (2008) Hasselblad Award, the world’s highest distinction in photography.

Renowned for her portraits of the Seri Indians, who inhabit the desert region of Sonora, in northern Mexico, as well as her vision of the women of Juchitán (on the Isthmus of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca), in southern Mexico, she is also celebrated for her fascinating essay on the birds that she has spent so many years photographing. Graciela Iturbide’s visual itinerary has spanned such contrasting countries as Spain, United States, India, Italy and Madagascar, in addition to her native Mexico. Her curiosity about diverse forms of cultural diversity have turned travel into a work dynamic through which she expresses her artistic drive: “to photograph as a pretext for getting to know” (as she herself puts it).

Iturbide’s unique gaze moves between the documentary and the poetic, to focus the lens integrating what has been experienced and what has been dreamed, in a complex web of historical, social and cultural references. The fragility of ancestral traditions and their difficult survival, the interaction between nature and culture, the importance of ritual in everyday body language, and the symbolic dimension of landscapes and randomly found objects are paramount to her richly productive career. Her work is characterized by an ongoing dialogue among images, times and symbols, a poetic display in which dream, ritual, religion, travel, and community all blend together.

One of her best-known projects was with the Zapotec women of Juchitán, introduced through the photograph Nuestra Señora de las Iguanas (Our Lady of the Iguanas), in which iguanas ride astride the headdress of a stoic woman who symbolizes the strength and pride of this significant matriarchal society. In this collection, Iturbide explores issues of gender, ritual, personality, and everyday village life. Throughout her exhibits, Iturbide’s great love of Mexico and its people ring true, as well as her sensitivity to culture and landscape. When announcing her selection for the Hasselblad award, the Foundation stated that “Iturbide has extended the concept of documentary photography, to explore the relationships between man and nature, the individual and the cultural, the real and the psychological.”

In the U.S, the largest institutional collection of her photographs is maintained by Texas State University, San Marcos, in the Wittliff Collections.