



Mexican Art

Painting has existed in Mexico as an art form for more than **two thousand years**. During the Maya and Aztec civilisations, architecture and sculpture were very important, but painting on ceramics and in **codices** (old "books" where the writing was pictures, not letters) show that these societies enjoyed painting.

Colours were used as symbols. Yellow, the colour of corn, symbolised food, whilst black, the colour of obsidian (a volcanic glass-like rock used to make tools), represented weapons, and red symbolised blood.



Old and New Muralists of Mexico

Traditionally, Mexican artists painted directly on walls- these paintings are known as murals. Examples include the murals of Bonampak and Cacaxtla. **Bonampak** is an archeological site in the State of Chiapas, in the southern tip of Mexico, near the town of Comitán.



The ruins of Bonampak were covered by jungle and the murals were not discovered until 1946. **The murals are about 1200 years old.**

They decorate three rooms of a temple and show some scenes from ancient Maya life.

After the Mexican Revolution in 1910, painters used the Mexican people for their inspiration. Murals showing miners, farmers, labourers and factory workers during this time became very popular.



Some famous Mexican muralists were: **José Clemente Orozco**, **David Alfaro Siqueiros**, and **Diego Rivera**.

Diego Rivera

Diego Rivera was born in the state of Guanajuato in 1886. He began painting at the age of 10, in Mexico City. His murals often showed scenes and figures from Mexican history, or the daily life of Mexicans. Sometimes he painted from 8 o'clock in the morning until 3 o'clock the following morning and if he was inspired he painted between one to six square meters of wall. He loved to paint children in his murals.

Rivera's murals can be seen on the walls of public buildings such as the National Palace, the National University and the Ministry of Education in Mexico City. Rivera also painted murals in the United States.



Frida Kahlo

Was born in 1907 in Mexico City. At 16, the bus she was travelling on collided with a streetcar and she was severely injured. This accident affected the rest of her life and her art. She began painting whilst recovering from her injuries. At first her work was true to life, but later it became more "dream-like" in style, and eventually it became surrealistic.

She married the muralist Diego Rivera. Many of her paintings include portraits of her and Diego.

Her work has been exhibited all around the world and her paintings rank with the most valuable in the world.



Mexican Murals

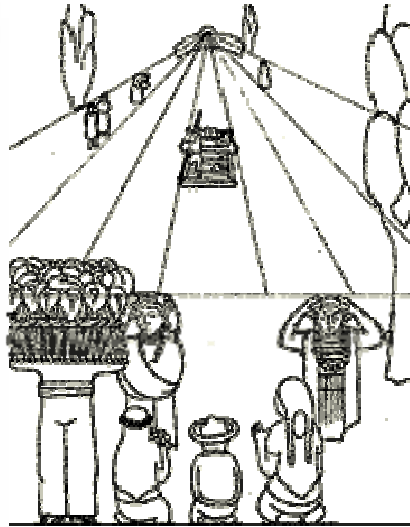
Here are some murals of Diego Rivera:



Do you know which one of these murals represents the Day of the Dead?

Look closer to the picture in the left. *Do you know what is happening? What are the people doing, and can you tell when this happened? Was it during the fight for independence from Spain or during the Revolution?*

The mural in the next page was also painted by Diego Rivera and it represents a traditional celebration of Good Friday in a canal called Santa Anita in the area of Xochimilco near Mexico City. For centuries this canal was used to transport food and other products to Mexico City.



On the right above is Rivera's sketch. Can you see the figures near you are larger and the ones at the back are smaller? This effect is called "perspective" and is used by painters to give a far away effect, notice how the lines join at the back behind the bridge.

Popular arts and crafts

Muñequitas de hoja de maíz (Corn dolls)

How to make corn dolls:

Materials

3 sticks 20 cm. long
dry maize husks
thread
water colours or vegetables paints



1. Using the thread (or string) tie the three sticks together
2. Wet the husks until they are soft
3. Wrap the sticks with the husks
4. Put some string around the neck, arms and waist
5. Paint the dolls in your own, special style



Ojo de Dios (Eye of God)

The eye of God has been made by the indians of Mexico, Central and South America, for hundreds of years. The diamond pattern in the centre symbolises the eye of God. The bands of colour around the diamond are meant to show the wisdom and light coming from the eye.

How to make the Ojo de Dios:

Materials:

4 different colours of yarn (preferably bright colours)
2 sticks to make a cross (lollipop sticks or larger)

1. Make a cross with the two sticks
2. Choose the colour that will be in the middle of the eye.
3. With one end of the yarn, tie the cross in place using square knots
4. Start winding the yarn around the crossed sticks and follow the pattern in the picture
5. Hold the yarn fairly tight as you wind it round
6. Keep winding around the sticks. As you wind, lay each yarn next to the yarn before it, covering up the loose ends
7. The yarn should lie in neat rows
8. To change colour, put the end of the first yarn and the beginning of the second yarn behind one of the sticks
9. Hold the two yarns in place with your thumb
10. Start winding the second colour around sticks
11. After a couple of turns, the second colour will be held in place
12. Keep winding the yarn on and making pattern with the colours
13. Stop winding just before you get to the end of the stick
14. For decoration, you can tie pompoms to the ends of the sticks

