

NEWS RELEASE

2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA 90049-6833

TEL: (310) 440-4500
FAX: (310) 440-4595

E-MAIL: communications@skirball.org
WEBSITE: www.skirball.org



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 14, 2017

Media Contacts:

Emma Jacobson-Sive, (323) 842-2064, emma@ejs-media.com

Mia Cariño, (310) 440-4544, communications@skirball.org

Skirball Cultural Center to present

ANOTHER PROMISED LAND: ANITA BRENNER'S MEXICO

September 14, 2017–February 25, 2018

Exhibition celebrates Mexican-American Jewish cultural trailblazer

**Features works by luminaries of the Mexican Renaissance
including Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and Frida Kahlo**

LOS ANGELES—The Skirball Cultural Center announces *Another Promised Land: Anita Brenner's Mexico*, on view September 14, 2017 through February 25, 2018. This exhibition illuminates the life and work of one of the most fascinating cultural figures of twentieth-century Mexico, Anita Brenner (1905–1974). A Mexican-born journalist, art historian, and anthropologist of Latvian Jewish descent who spent part of her youth in Texas, Brenner chronicled the Mexican Renaissance of the 1920s and played a vital role in introducing Mexican art and culture to American audiences. Through more than 150 objects—including artworks by close friends Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, Edward Weston, Jean Charlot, and Frida Kahlo—the exhibition underscores her efforts to build cultural understanding between the United States and Mexico.

As the child of Jewish immigrants in Mexico, and herself an immigrant to the United States, Brenner often found herself in the position of the outsider. This sense of self informed much of her work. She fought against prejudice she faced as a Jew; and as a Mexican-American, she worked tirelessly—through her books, articles, poetry, and the tourism magazine she founded and edited—to create a favorable image of Mexico in the minds of Americans. *Another Promised Land: Anita Brenner's Mexico* opens a conversation about the complexities of nationality and identity on both sides of the border by weaving together Brenner's story with the history of Mexico and its relationship with the U.S. in the twentieth century.

Another Promised Land: Anita Brenner's Mexico is part of Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, a far-reaching and ambitious exploration of Latin American and Latino art in dialogue with Los Angeles, taking place from September 2017 through January 2018 at more than seventy cultural institutions across Southern California. Pacific Standard Time is an initiative of the Getty. Major support for the exhibition and its companion publication has been provided through grants from the Getty Foundation.

“The Skirball Cultural Center is honored to participate in the Getty’s Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, which fully aligns with our mission to bridge people of diverse heritage and history,” remarked Robert Kirschner, Skirball Museum Director. “*Another Promised Land: Anita Brenner’s Mexico* invites us to learn about our neighbors while challenging us to consider how we represent cultures that are not our own.”

EXHIBITION OVERVIEW

Another Promised Land: Anita Brenner’s Mexico is organized by Skirball exhibition curator Laura Mart and guest curator Karen Cordero, an independent curator and professor of art history at the Universidad Iberoamericana in Mexico City. The exhibition will be organized in five sections:

A Jewish Girl of Mexico—This section traces Anita Brenner’s background and early childhood. Born in 1905 in Aguascalientes, Mexico, to Latvian Jewish immigrant parents, Brenner moved as a young girl to San Antonio to escape the violence of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920). In both Mexico and the U.S., Brenner was ostracized for her foreignness and Jewishness. This dual discrimination found its way into Brenner’s consciousness of her identity as both a Mexican and a Jew.

Brenner returned to Mexico City in her late teens, where she assumed a prominent role in the world of post-revolutionary Mexican, American, and European thinkers, artists, and writers of the avant-garde. She became an observer, recorder, and interlocutor of artists like Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, José Clemente Orozco, Jean Charlot, Tina Modotti, and Edward Weston, developing friendships and flirtations with many of them. This first section of the exhibition includes portraits of Brenner by some of these artists, as well as bilingual correspondence and family photographs, and traces Brenner’s Mexico City network through photographic portraits and other artworks.

Idols Behind Altars—In 1929, Brenner wrote the book *Idols Behind Altars*, a seminal work on Mexican modern art. In it she combined folklore and history to paint the story of Mexico in broad strokes, recording her firsthand impressions of the artists, their work, and their dramas. Brenner commissioned Weston and Modotti to take photographs of Mexican art and cultural sites to serve as illustrations for the book. Its vision of Mexican art and culture inspired Russian filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein to create his famous film project *¡Que Viva Mexico!*, an unfinished legend of modernist cinema.

This section of the exhibition includes several of the paintings, drawings, and prints that appeared in *Idols Behind Altars*, as well as pre-Columbian and folk art objects similar to ones that Brenner chose to illustrate the book. It will also feature more than a dozen of the original Weston and Modotti photographs commissioned by Brenner, as well as clips from Eisenstein’s *¡Que Viva Mexico!*

Art and Revolution—Brenner and her cohort established the imagery that would come to define the Mexican Revolution and capture the popular imagination through writing, art, and music. In the 1920s, muralism emerged as an art form particularly well-suited to political content. Artists such as Rivera, Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Charlot painted thousands of square feet in government buildings around Mexico. The popularity of these projects helped these artists land mural commissions in the U.S., which resulted in some of the greatest and most controversial public works of art in the nation.

This section of the exhibition looks at the development of the mural movement in the 1920s through preparatory materials and photographs. It takes a close look at Rivera’s Rockefeller Center controversy—the mural he created there was chiseled off two years after he painted it—which Brenner reported on in depth for the *New York Times*. Also included are visual records of and reactions to the Mexican Revolution, including prints by Leopoldo Méndez, Orozco, and Rivera, and materials from *The*

Wind That Swept Mexico, Brenner's 1943 book on the Mexican Revolution. Finally, this section considers Brenner's engagement with left-wing activism in the 1930s, concentrating on her journalistic coverage of the Spanish Civil War and her role in securing Leon Trotsky's asylum in Mexico.

Projections of a Changing Mexico—Starting in the 1930s, Brenner worked to promote tourism in Mexico using the country's cultural heritage as a point of attraction. Her popular guidebook *Your Mexican Holiday* (1932) and tourist magazine *Mexico / this month* (1955–1971) encouraged Americans to travel south of the border to experience Mexico and its people firsthand. Her children's books set in Mexico used sources from folktales to tell stories of courage, virtue, and magic for English-speaking audiences.

This section traces how imagery and texts circulated by Brenner and her circle, from the 1920s through the 1970s, shaped foreigners' understanding of Mexican culture. On view are works by Rivera, Weston, Lola Cueto, and Miguel Covarrubias that reveal the influence of *indigenismo* on their art; Brenner's books for children and her magazine *Mexico / this month*; and a selection of works by well-known Mexican photographers such as Héctor García, Nacho López, and Manuel Álvarez Bravo, which appeared in *Mexico / this month*. The last subsection features art from the 1950s through 1970s by several of Brenner's friends, including Mathias Goeritz, Leonora Carrington, Pedro Coronel, and Myra Landau. These works, which reflect Mexican artists' involvement in international movements like geometric abstraction and surrealism as well as the substantial emigration of Europeans to Mexico, provide a counterpoint to the *indigenista* aesthetics and subject matter of work more commonly associated with Mexican art of the early twentieth century.

Roots in the Land—The closing section of the exhibition looks at Brenner's final years, when she returned to her family's ranch in Aguascalientes, Mexico. It chronicles her efforts to revitalize the ranch as a commercial agricultural operation with elements adapted from the Israeli *kibbutz* model, and considers the way that Brenner dealt with the legacy of the Mexican Revolution, particularly its call for land justice.

EXHIBITION CATALOGUE

Another Promised Land: Anita Brenner's Mexico will be accompanied by a bilingual exhibition catalogue edited by Karen Cordero and featuring essays by Doris Berger, Karen Cordero, Tatiana Flores, Linde Lehtinen, Laura Mart, and Ilan Stavans. The 288-page book, with more than one hundred illustrations, will be available for purchase at Audrey's Museum Store at the Skirball.

COMPANION EXHIBITION

Conceived as a companion to *Another Promised Land: Anita Brenner's Mexico*, the exhibition *Surface Tension by Ken Gonzales-Day: Murals, Signs, and Mark-Making in L.A.* will feature nearly 100 new works by Ken Gonzales-Day, the celebrated photographer, interdisciplinary artist, and 2017 Guggenheim Fellow. For this original series, commissioned by the Skirball, Gonzales-Day drew inspiration from Edward Weston and Tina Modotti, who documented the artistic heritage of Mexico for Brenner's book *Idols Behind Altars*. Gonzales-Day journeyed across Los Angeles, seeking out and photographing the city's most intriguing murals. Found in virtually every neighborhood, these works speak about the experiences of far-flung communities, promote dialogue and interaction, and enrich the city's visual

landscape.

Surface Tension by Ken Gonzales-Day: Murals, Signs, and Mark-Making in L.A. will be on view at the Skirball October 6, 2017–February 25, 2018.

ANOTHER PROMISED LAND: ANITA BRENNER'S MEXICO IS ORGANIZED BY THE SKIRBALL CULTURAL CENTER AS PART OF PACIFIC STANDARD TIME: LA/LA.



MAJOR SUPPORT PROVIDED BY GRANTS FROM THE GETTY FOUNDATION.



ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE EXHIBITION AND ITS RELATED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IS PROVIDED IN PART BY:

Brener Family
Linda and Michael Keston

About the Skirball Cultural Center

The Skirball Cultural Center is a place of meeting guided by the Jewish tradition of welcoming the stranger and inspired by the American democratic ideals of freedom and equality. We welcome people of all communities and generations to participate in cultural experiences that celebrate discovery and hope, foster human connections, and call upon us to help build a more just society.

Visiting the Skirball Cultural Center

The Skirball Cultural Center is located at 2701 N. Sepulveda Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90049. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday 12:00–5:00 p.m.; Saturday–Sunday 10:00 a.m.–5:00 p.m.; closed Mondays and holidays. Admission to exhibitions beginning March 1, 2016: \$12 General; \$9 Seniors, Full-Time Students, and Children over 12; \$7 Children 2–12. Exhibitions are always FREE to Skirball Members and Children under 2. Exhibitions are FREE to all visitors on Thursdays. For general information, the public may call (310) 440-4500 or visit skirball.org.

About Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA

Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA is a far-reaching and ambitious exploration of Latin American and Latino art in dialogue with Los Angeles taking place from September 2017 through January 2018. Led by the Getty, Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA is a collaboration of arts institutions across Southern California.

Through a series of thematically linked exhibitions and programs, Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA highlights different aspects of Latin American and Latino art from the ancient world to the present day. With topics such as luxury arts in the pre-Columbian Americas, twentieth century Afro-Brazilian art, alternative spaces in Mexico City, and boundary-crossing practices of Latino artists, exhibitions range from monographic studies of individual artists to broad surveys that cut across numerous countries.

Supported by more than \$16 million in grants from the Getty Foundation, Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA involves more than seventy cultural institutions from Los Angeles to Palm Springs, and from San Diego to Santa Barbara. Pacific Standard Time is an initiative of the Getty. The presenting sponsor is Bank of America.