

Revolutionary Road

IN MEXICO, EDWARD WESTON MADE WAVES WITH PHOTOGRAPHY, NOT POLITICS. BY JONATHAN LOPEZ



From top: Paul Strand, *Día de Fiesta*, 1933, platinum print; Edward Weston, *Revolución*, 1926, platinum or palladium print. Strand's photograph celebrates the Mexican working class, while Weston's appears to satirize revolutionary politics.

"I SHOULD BE photographing more steel mills or paper factories," Edward Weston wrote in his daybook on Sept. 13, 1923, "but here I am in romantic Mexico ... There are sunlit walls of fascinating surface textures, and there are clouds!"

Unlike his politically committed colleague Paul Strand, who went to Mexico in the wake of the revolution to document the lives of campesinos in projects underwritten by the government of President Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, Weston had no particular interest in class struggle, socialism or societal upheaval. He had opted to leave his California home and head south of the border mostly to take a break from one woman, his wife, while in pursuit of another, the beautiful Italian-American actress Tina Modotti. She would become his studio assistant, model and lover. They lived and worked together, on and off, from 1923 to 1926 in a house on Mexico City's fashionable Calle Lucerna.

A sampling of Weston's photographs from this period, including his earliest for-

ays into still life, landscape and cloud studies, can be seen in the current show *Viva Mexico! Edward Weston and His Contemporaries*, at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. It has been mounted as a companion to *Vida y Drama*, also at the MFA, an

exhibition of Mexican prints from the same period, most of them with strong political and propagandistic overtones. The pairing of these two exhibitions (both of which will be on view through Nov. 2) makes clear that, revolutionary though Weston was for introducing the modernist vocabulary of abstraction into American photography, he was not a revolutionary in a political sense.

"I feel a little defensive about it," says curator Karen Haas of Weston's disengagement from current events during his stay in Mexico. Emphasizing that the photographer felt a tremendous respect for Mexican culture, apparent in his frequent use of craft objects as motifs for his still lifes and Aztec ruins for his landscapes, she says that he was simply not inclined to compromise the integrity of his work by weighing it down with an overt message or by committing it to the service of a cause.



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