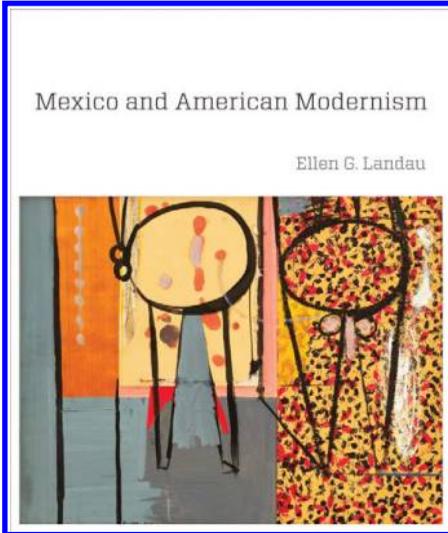


MEXICO AND AMERICAN MODERNISM. By Ellen G. Landau. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2013. 206 pp. \$50.00) Reviewed by Victoria H.F. Scott.

Ellen Landau is a specialist of American and European art at Case Western University. In her new book *Mexico and American Modernism* she analyzes the



influence of Mexico on artistic production in the United States in order to present a more accurate vision of the American artistic landscape of the nineteen thirties and forties. Though Mexico and Mexican artists were important for the American cultural scene at this time, more often than not American artistic production from this the period is discussed misleadingly and exclusively in relation to what was happening in Europe. The study is divided into two parts — the first section, “The 1930s, Mexico, Art, and Politics,” contains two chapters: one on Isamu Noguchi’s sculptural relief *History Mexico (History as Seen from Mexico)*, realized in Mexico City

in 1936, and another on the mural *The Struggle Against Terrorism*, painted by Philip Guston and Reuben Kadish in Morelia, Mexico, in 1934–35. The second part, “The 1940s, Mexico, and Abstract Expressionism,” contains more general discussions of the oeuvre of Pollock and Motherwell respectively, and a final chapter compares their work.

In addition to strengthening our appreciation for the significance of Mexico for the American artistic narrative, Landau also wants to fill in the gaps in what has been up until now the definitive treatment of the subject: *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1914-1947* (1993). As she points out, *South of the Border*—which was an exhibition catalogue—discussed more than sixty Mexican and American artists. Therefore, it would be impossible to do justice to the subject in one book. Obviously a whole series of more focused studies are in order. In that sense, *Mexico and American Modernism* can be considered a preview for what is to come, the first step in a much larger endeavor. Indeed, it is full of interesting observations and shines a light on several epic works of art that deserve more attention, proving the author’s point again and again that art historians need to look much closer at the Mexican-American dialectic and take it much more seriously as a key point of departure for everything that came afterward. That is the book’s main contribution in fact: it demonstrates that this subject is incredibly rich and compelling, worthy of sustained and wide ranging art historical analysis.

As the author states, Noguchi’s idea was to create a “mural in sculpture.” The result was an incredible work of art that preceded Picasso’s *Guernica* and demonstrates the importance of Noguchi to the history of American and twentieth-century

art. Works such as this one, which remain largely unknown to all but specialists, only confirm his importance. In this chapter, after a review of the existing literature, the author elaborates upon the work's connection to Martha Graham's modern dance and her interest in Mexico. Comparing the sculptural and political rhythm of the installation to Graham's ideas about movement and space is an interesting exercise, but the significance of this approach, or why it is important in connection with the influence of Mexico, remains unclear.

In the second chapter we are introduced to yet another brilliant work of art, the previously mentioned mural at the Museo Regional Michoacano in Morelia, *Struggle Against Terrorism*, from 1934–35. Again, it is an ambitious and vital work by two very young American artists, though chronologically-speaking it might have been better as the subject of the first chapter. Noguchi must have known about this mural, not only on account of its epic dimensions—1024 square feet—but also because this mural was censored until 1973 and remains understudied and—if the available images are any indication—scandalously *underconserved*.

The second half of the book shifts gears completely, and the chapters no longer deliberate on particular works of art. “Reinventing Muralism: Pollock, Mexican Art, and the Origins of Action Painting” gauges the importance of Orozco and Siqueiros for the artist's work. It is an important chapter because Pollock's love for Orozco is often overlooked. There is a lovely anecdote in the endnotes of this chapter about how the American sculptor Tony Smith once asked Pollock what he thought the greatest work of art in North America was. Tellingly Pollock replied, “The Orozco fresco at Pomona College.” That said, a more systematic discussion built around a focused selection of paintings or a thematic work of art, for example, would have linked this half of the book to the preceding section in a more natural and logical way.

Robert Motherwell, a major figure of Abstract Expressionism, stayed in Mexico longer than other foreign artists, married a Mexican woman, Maria Emilia Ferreira y Moyers, and was very close to the Chilean artist Roberto Matta. This chapter roams far and wide, unveiling all kinds of new dimensions to an artist who was arguably the most important conduit between Europe and North America in the twentieth century. Landau also introduces us to a whole cast of intriguing secondary characters, which give the reader a real sense of the depth and breadth of Mexico's importance for the United States in these years. After all, Mexico was the cultural and political bridge to Europe, through the imbricated forces of Mexican muralism and Surrealism. Motherwell was the leading protagonist in that story, though perhaps not the most charismatic one. In another terrific endnote, we learn that André Breton often referred to him as “le petit philosophe.” Indeed, Matta emerges as a much more sympathetic and persuasive figure than Motherwell, raising the question of his own significance for American modernism.

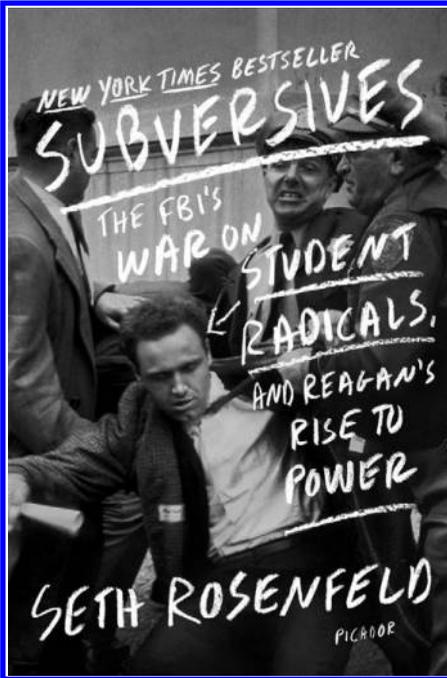
Summing up, the author writes in the conclusion that: “Previous books have analyzed the Mexican impact on these artists individually, but here I have taken a more synthetic approach.” The book's broad strokes point the way forward for future scholarship on this subject. A whole series of more pointed studies of the institutions (museums, universities, art schools), journals, critics, filmmakers, architects, photographers, and sculptors is what is needed; books that also grapple

meaningfully and convincingly with the twin issues of politics and religion, that are so important for the art and culture of this region, would be, I am sure, enthusiastically welcomed. Indeed what this book calls for is a whole new series of volumes devoted specifically to this extremely compelling and complicated subject that Dr. Landau has now drawn to our rapt attention.

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*SUBVERSIVES: The FBI's War on Student Radicals, and Reagan's Rise to Power.* By Seth Rosenfeld. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012. 734 pp. \$40.00 cloth.) Reviewed by John T. Donovan.

Seth Rosenfeld's *Subversives* is an impressive work, boasting about 500 pages of text, 162 pages of notes, and a seven-page appendix detailing his almost 30-year fight with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) for documents he requested under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). Previous work on Reagan has stressed his reaction to the Watts Riot and the protest after a San Francisco policeman shot a young African American at Hunters Point. (The work of Lou Cannon, Matthew Dallek, and Ethan Rarick examined the racial tensions.)<sup>1</sup> Race is certainly a factor in *Subversives*, although the terms "Hunters Point" and "Watts" cannot be found in Rosenfeld's index. Instead, Rosenfeld focuses on student anger over the war in Southeast Asia.



Ronald Reagan tapped into the resentment many Californians felt over the Free Speech Movement (or FSM) at the University of California, Berkeley and the rising opposition there (and at other

campuses) to the Vietnam conflict. Rosenfeld looks at three major figures: Reagan himself, the former actor who used the tumult at Berkeley to further his political career; Clark Kerr, the economist who became the University of California president, only to be vilified in the 1960s by right-wing politicians for not cracking down on student dissent, but demonized as well by student protestors for his perceived

1. See Lou Cannon, *Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2003), Matthew Dallek, *The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan's First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics* (New York: The Free Press, 2000), and Ethan Rarick, *California Rising: The Life and Times of Pat Brown* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2005).