

Banking on Folk Art: Banamex-Citigroup and Transnational Cultural Citizenship

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This article offers two readings of *The Great Masters of Mexican Folk Art*, a travelling exhibition of the Fomento Cultural Banamex, AC's folk art collection that coincided with Citigroup's buyout of Banamex, Mexico's second largest bank. The first, a political economic critique, situates the exhibition within the neoliberal economic reform of the Mexican banking system and the designs of US-based transnational banks on migrant remittances. The second, a material culture approach, focuses on the exhibitionary strategies employed to incentivise folk art consumption as a mode of cosmopolitan citizenship.

Keywords: Citizenship, consumption, exhibition, folk art, Mexico.

When the Mexican government mounted *Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries* (1990) at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art to facilitate negotiations over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Shifra Goldman (1994) noted that it marked a new phase in the 'long history of utilising artworks and art exhibitions as symbolic carriers [...] for political ideologies and economic transactions' between Mexico and the United States. 'The process of utilising art in this fashion', she argued, 'can no longer be seen solely as the product of competing nations or nationalities, but rather as a phenomenon consistent with the transnational or multinational realities of global political economies and their strategies'. In the past, exhibitions aided the exploitation of dependent countries by 'First World' elites; since the 1990s, Goldman concluded, exhibitions have aligned 'power elites from nations of the First and Third Worlds [...] whose objective is the control of resources and cultural configurations *across national boundaries*' (1994: 326–327, emphasis in original).

Splendors is the template for the neoliberal blockbuster, and its example has been taken up by federal and non-governmental entities in Mexico, eager to assuage anxieties and facilitate transnational agendas in a period of mounting tensions over immigration and the privatisation of national economies. In this essay I examine *The Great Masters of Mexican Folk Art*, a travelling exhibition organised by the Fomento Cultural Banamex, AC, a civil association owned and funded by Banamex, Mexico's largest private bank, to showcase the work of Master Artisans identified and promoted by its Folk Art Support Programme. *Great Masters* began at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts in 2001, travelled to Chicago's Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum, and culminated in 2002–2003 at the Smithsonian's National Museum of the American Indian located in the George Gustav

Heye Center at the former Custom's House in Lower Manhattan's Financial District. An identical exhibition travelled to Madrid, London, Berlin, and Paris over the same period. While part of the broader initiative of the Folk Art Support Programme, the exhibition's US debut was timed to coincide with the Citigroup buyout of Banamex in 2001.

Following Goldman's insight about neoliberal blockbusters, I examine the convergence of interests between the Fomento's Folk Art Support Programme, Citigroup and the middle-class consumer/citizens targeted by the exhibition. I ask *why* an exhibition of Mexican folk art was enlisted to align 'power elites' from the 'First' and 'Third' Worlds and *how* this exhibition participates in the 'control of resources and cultural configurations across national boundaries'. To answer these questions I offer two readings of the exhibition. Both turn upon a theory of citizenship as a technique of governance that proceeds through the cultured subject. The first reading takes a political economic approach. By exploring the financial agenda behind the Citigroup buyout, I critique the exhibition and demonstrate how it participated in the exploitation of Mexico's poor. My second reading employs a material culture framework. By analysing the way *Great Masters* produced a new regime of value for folk art, I provide a more hopeful assessment of its diffuse effects on middle-class consumer/citizens.

The Political Economy of *Great Masters*: The Dark Side of Cultural Citizenship

Why did folk art become a particularly expedient form of culture for the various agendas of transnational corporate banking? I begin with the neoliberal reform of Mexico's economy. Mexico's neoliberal transformation began in 1982 when it defaulted on its international loans after the oil market collapsed. President Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988) initiated macroeconomic stabilisation measures through trade liberalisation. His successor, Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994), deepened the state's commitment to neoliberalism by championing free-market reforms and negotiating Mexico's entry into NAFTA (Castañeda, 1995; Haber, 1997). Salinas's administration rapidly privatised state-owned enterprises and financial institutions in an attempt to woo foreign investment. Along with the airlines, telecommunications industry, and petroleum exploration and refining, Salinas re-privatised and deregulated the Mexican banking system between 1990 and 1993.

Private ownership further concentrated Mexico's banking assets among a powerful elite who formed financial holding companies to elude the limits imposed on share-ownership by the Ministry of Finance (Ramírez, 2001). The relationships between these financial and industrial *grupos* resulted in a lack of competition that artificially boosted profits, encouraging heavy lending to the private sector and the indiscriminate expansion of consumer credit. When the economy collapsed and the peso was devalued in 1994–1995, the banks could not cover the losses of their nonperforming loans.

The threatened bankruptcy of the Mexican banking system forced a government bailout at \$3.5 billion, a loss that was then 'socialised' by Mexican taxpayers (Ramírez, 2001: 658). The banking crisis led to an unprecedented penetration of the market by foreign banks, opening the door to transnational mergers and foreign ownership. Between 1994 and 1999 foreign, predominantly non-US, ownership of Mexican banks increased from 3 to 22 per cent (Ramírez, 2001: 666). Then, in 2001 when the

New York-based Citigroup purchased Banamex, that percentage jumped to 80 per cent (*Los Angeles Times*, 2001: B.10).

As a result of the merger, Citigroup now controls roughly one-quarter of the market in Mexico (Rehm, 2001). Hailed by free-market economists as a 'win-win' for Mexico and the United States, the Citigroup-Banamex merger was conceived of as a 'trans-border North American bank' (Stevenson, 2001: E.8). The argument held that Citigroup's solvency promised to bring financial stability to Mexican banking, which in turn would further incentivise trade, direct capital into the country and thereby stem the flow of illegal immigrants across the border. Additionally, supporters argued that Banamex's name recognition would improve Citigroup's access to Mexican consumers in both Mexico and the United States.

Historically, poor Mexicans have been reluctant to open bank accounts, hold credit cards or take out loans. However, Citigroup hoped to expand slowly into this sector by targeting Mexicans working in the United States. The 2000 Census, which forecast 'Hispanics' as the fastest growing minority in the United States, coupled with initiatives undertaken by the Mexican government under President Vicente Fox (2000-2006) to address the needs of migrant workers, encouraged banks to reconsider this population as potential customers (Jackson, 2001: 41). While the small loan needs of Latino citizens were targeted for market expansion, the remittances sent by Mexican workers living legally and illegally within the United States were the real prize. (Krebsbach, 2002; Grillo, 2003).

When Citigroup merged with Banamex, migrated workers sent \$8 billion a year to families in Mexico, although many who study remittances estimate that as much as \$2 billion more a year was moved physically rather than electronically. At that time the transfer of \$1,000 to Mexico could cost the sender as much as \$30 or \$40 in fees and was typically transacted through Western Union or Money Gram. However, with the entrance of banks into the remittance market (as opposed to wiring services that do not offer permanent accounts for users) a competitive pricing war broke out that significantly reduced fees while encouraging Mexicans living in the United States and Mexico to open cheque and savings accounts.

Along with merger-acquisitions and competitive pricing, banks developed strategies to address Mexicans' suspicion of banks in general and their aversion to accruing debt. Some West Coast banks opened Spanish-speaking branches, improved translation in written materials and formed partnerships with Hispanic-friendly retail centres to gain access to a resistant clientele. One enterprising bank, Valley Credit Union, began 'financial literacy classes' in Hispanic neighbourhoods. Working through Catholic charities, the bank used religious lessons to acclimate immigrants to the idea of credit. 'We start with the basic definition of thrift', explains Anthony Jones, CEO of the credit union, 'and graduate to talking about what credit is and how you get it' (Lacy, 2001: 62). These strategies reveal how canny corporations have become at exploiting Latino cultural citizenship for profit.

Renato Rosaldo characterises cultural citizenship as a political demand for recognition that challenges the 'dominant claims of universal citizenship' predicated on a 'white male subject' that excludes or marginalises 'people who differ in gender, race, sexuality, and age' (1997: 37). Rosaldo traces the notion of cultural citizenship to the new social movements of the 1990s, which in recognising 'new categories of persons' empowered them to 'make claims on their fellow citizens and the state' from the basis of difference (1997: 30). In banking the recognition of cultural difference (regarding attitudes toward credit, for example) has generated culturally sensitive strategies that

provide access to financial resources (a quantitative expansion of economic citizenship). However, these culturally sensitive tactics exploit cultural values – such as thrift – to craft new consumers vulnerable to the apparatuses of credit and therefore debt.

Toby Miller argues that this double edge is constitutive of cultural citizenship. He notes that many of the 'new forms of publicly expressed identity' that seek recognition by the mainstream 'have emerged from a combination of expanded human and civil rights discourse and expanded niche marketing [...] and consumer targeting' (2001: 3). While minoritised groups have been effective at harnessing the ethical force of human rights discourses to their cause, they have inadvertently succeeded in generating new niches for marketers to exploit. Relatedly, Arlene Dávila (2001) demonstrates that the identity category of 'Latinos' itself has been codified and promoted by corporations from within and outside the specific communities that comprise its demographic to capture the consuming power of a newly powerful 'Hispanic' market. Understood in these terms, the Citigroup buyout of Banamex was but one initiative within US corporate capital to capture the Latino consumer.

With the acquisition of Banamex, Citigroup became a major player in the Hispanic/Latino market. Banamex's brand identification among transborder Mexicans and its competitive position within Mexico gave Citigroup access to consumers and infrastructure. By establishing low transfer fees and a series of electronic and online account-sharing options Citigroup chipped into Western Union's share of the market (Krebsbach, 2002). Within three years of the buyout, the amount of money sent back to Mexico increased from an estimated \$9 billion to \$14.5 billion, exceeding estimated growth by almost \$3 billion (Thompson, 2003). Further, a poll conducted in 2003 by the Inter American Development Bank suggested that migrant Mexicans' suspicion of financial institutions is waning, as 45 per cent of the people polled said they received their remittance payments from a bank or credit institution rather than through a money wiring service (Thompson, 2003).

For Mexican-Americans (and other Latino citizen groups) attention from banks means access to housing loans and small business financing that they were barred from before. For undocumented workers corporate pressure has paved the way for acceptance of Mexican identification cards (the *matricula consular*) that grant access not only to bank accounts, but also driver's licences, library cards and basic utilities such as electricity and phone service (Associated Press, 2003). Viewed by some as a step towards amnesty for illegal immigrants, the identity cards represent yet another dimension of cultural citizenship, one that Miller attributes to transformations taking place as a result of (not in opposition to) globalisation. 'Citizenship', he writes, 'is no longer easily based on soil or blood. Rather, it is founded on some variant of those qualities in connection with *culture and the capitalist labor market*. And the state is no longer the sole frame of citizenship in the face of new nationalism and cross-border affinities that no single governmental apparatus can contain' (Miller, 2001: 4–5, emphasis in original).

As the Banamex example illustrates, the Mexican government appealed to the profit-seeking motives of US banks to extend certain economic rights to a transborder population, thereby circumscribing US opposition to political amnesty. In the process, transnational banks penetrated the Mexican economy extending their consumer base across national territories through the cultural affinities and kinship networks of migrated labour. However, this corporate (not juridical) acceptance of Mexican workers does nothing to alter the militarisation of the border, nor does it enable non-citizens to avail themselves of social services or basic worker's rights. In effect, this embrace is little

more than an opportunity for transnational corporations and the Mexican economy to more effectively profit from migrated labour without any political responsibility for the well-being of the actual workers who risk their lives in this endeavour. Whether or not Mexican workers will find a way to capitalise on these paltry concessions remains to be seen. As Miller argues, it is not only labour that transcends the nation-state in the age of NAFTA, but also the law. 'Cultural citizenship's uptake as a crucial site of governmentality', he suggests, has the potential to generate forms of supranational identity capable of making more radical citizenship claims (Miller, 2001: 5).

Despite the enthusiasm of free-market boosters, the bank merger was greeted with suspicion and anger by many in the United States and Mexico as both Citigroup and Banamex had been involved in high-profile Mexican drug money laundering scandals in the 1990s (Fritsch, 2000; Massing, 2001; Stevenson, 2001; Anon., 2002). Furthermore, given Banamex's stature and its substantial collection of national art and immovable heritage (largely comprised of colonial architectural holdings), Mexicans feared its economy and patrimony were being sold to the highest bidder (*American Banker*, 2001).

With criticism on both sides of the border, both Banamex and Citigroup needed to burnish their public image. Citigroup decided to maintain Banamex's cultural holdings and to allow the Fomento to continue as an autonomous civil association. And following the example of the *Splendors* exhibition, the Fomento mounted a blockbuster exhibition of its folk art collection. As an exhibition of a corporate collection, the company's name was prominently featured in all promotional, display and educational materials. And tellingly, the Banamex name was given priority, as in the title to the exhibition: *Great Masters of Mexican Folk Art, From the Collection of Fomento Cultural Banamex*. The Citigroup hyphenate appeared in diminished font-size within the official logo and only in lists of corporate sponsors. Further, the catalogue and wall text repeatedly framed the exhibition in terms of the Fomento Cultural Banamex's history of supporting, collecting and promoting Mexican culture.

It is important to note that when launching an exhibition from the Fomento's holdings, the bank turned to its folk art collection rather than to one of its other, ostensibly more important collections, such as colonial or modern painting. While less economically valuable, the folk art collection was more ideologically valuable for the purposes of the exhibition. In addition to furthering the Folk Art Support Program's agenda, the exhibition also showcased the philanthropic activities of the Fomento to promote the good corporate citizenship of Banamex and by extension its new parent/partner, Citigroup. In this sense, *Great Masters* was a global marketing tool that allowed Citigroup to massage negative press over their buyout, while simultaneously grafting the good works of the Fomento onto its own brand.

The handout accompanying the exhibition devoted more space to detailing the Folk Art Support Program's intentions, stages of implementation and modes of support than it did to clarifying terminology, relaying the history of folk art or explaining the objects themselves. Through relentless reminders of Banamex's good works the exhibitionary rhetoric emphasised the bank's long-term commitment to Mexico's folk heritage. Further, it crafted this commitment as a form of ethical philanthropy to present corporate patronage in a positive light and to generate good feelings toward the Banamex name.

Aligning a brand with social causes is part of asserting good corporate citizenship, an aspect of marketing that traditionally has proceeded through simple philanthropic giving, but since the 1990s has been reworked into a profit-seeking enterprise. Samantha

King analyses the historical conditions within the United States that transformed corporate philanthropy into 'cause-related marketing' (2001: 123). King demonstrates that this transformation came about through the intercalation of Reagan-era welfare reform – which called upon the private sector to partner with non-profits to develop and fund alternatives to public services – 'changing psychological conceptions of consumers, and invigorated consumer demands for a more ethical capitalism' (2001: 116). In response to this complex of demands, corporations increasingly associate their brand with causes with which they share 'territory' as a strategy for selling products, building consumer loyalty and converting charitable giving into measurable economic returns. While the history and strategies King surveys do not map onto Mexico's state–corporate alignments in any neat way, they do provide insight into why Banamex entered into folk art subsidy in the first place and how the *Great Masters* exhibition itself functioned as a form of cause-related marketing for Banamex–Citigroup within the US environment.

The emphasis on Banamex–Citigroup's philanthropy within the exhibition's marketing and ephemera also revealed the neoliberal dimensions of corporate sponsorship, collecting and exhibition within Mexico. As the text reproduced in the introductory text panel to the exhibition as well as the take-away pamphlet explained:

The [Folk Art Support] Program has three principal stages. Artisans representing the most important branches and specialties in the Mexican Republic were selected during the first phase. These artisans were awarded with a sum of money and Fomento Cultural Banamex, A C bought many of their pieces in order to make up the collection now presented to the public [...]. During the second stage, the needs to be satisfied were identified so that the workshops of such artisans were consolidated, with the main objective of passing on the knowledge and mastery of the great masters to others, in order to avoid its irreparable loss [...]. *Finally, the third stage is intended to make best use of the self-support of some of these consolidated workshops in order to stimulate their transformation into micro and small enterprises, with better bonds with the market.* (emphasis added)

The rhetoric of 'micro and small enterprises' demonstrates that the primary goal is the transformation of artisans into entrepreneurs so that they will be less dependent on state subsidies and assume greater responsibility for their own economic and social development. The first two stages – identifying masters and consolidating their workshops through grants and award monies – enable the third. By promoting 'Great Masters' and their work in coffee-table publications and exhibitions that target an international (largely middle-class) market, Banamex–Citigroup raises its profile and creates the aura of fine art necessary for its entry into a more lucrative global market for high-end but 'local' crafts.

Take Oscar Soteno Elías, a potter from Metepec in the State of Mexico. In 1996, Soteno won the Premio Fomento Cultural Banamex (an annual award), garnering him prize money and international exhibitions with catalogues in which his work was reproduced along with his contact information. This promotion brought the artist to the attention of foreign collectors whose interest induced Soteno to become an independent exporter selling his work abroad through museums and custom orders from individuals and corporations. As his international profile rose, he was contacted by Novica, an Internet art service that specialises in the sale of traditional crafts from developing countries, taking a cut of between 20 and 50 per cent. Once online, Soteno's sales

increased, forcing him to purchase more sophisticated communications equipment to keep up (Moreno, 2001).

Even though his family has been well known locally and throughout Mexico as talented ceramicists since Diego Rivera brought attention and acclaim to his grandmother's *tree of life* sculptures in the 1930s, they had never made much money at their trade nor had they participated directly in its export. However, as a result of the Folk Art Support Program, Soteno, who had only purchased his first telephone in 1993, had by 1998 bought a fax machine. The following year he purchased a computer when his workshop went online (Moreno, 2001). These overhead costs are paid for by the artist and his family through the proceeds they earn from the sale of their work.

In the past, Soteno and his family received small lines of credit from the local producer collective to cover the cost of materials and labour and then sold his work through Fondo Nacional para el Fomento de las Artesanías (FONART)¹ retail outlets. Now he is a self-sustaining small exporter. However, to sustain this kind of growth as well as remain solvent Soteno is heavily dependent upon European and US consumers. And while the market for Mexican goods grew exponentially in the late 1990s, after the economic recession coinciding with the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001, Soteno's sales fell 40 per cent. With 70 per cent of the export market in handcrafts generated by consumers in Europe and the US, artisans are extremely vulnerable to fluctuations in the global economy and this in turn makes capital investments beyond subsistence financially risky for these new entrepreneurs. As a result of this economic downturn, Soteno travelled to attend the opening of the *Great Masters* exhibition in Dallas, Texas, hoping that publicity around the exhibition might help him to recover financially from this unforeseen blow (Moreno, 2001). And indeed the exhibition seemed calculated to do just that, as its display strategies emphasised the commodity status *and* authenticity, and therefore collectability of the types of objects on display.

The exhibition presented the Fomento collection in a series of galleries organised according to material: clay, wood, stone, textiles, metals, paper, leather, vegetable fibres and mixed media. Objects were situated on open vitrines, hung on the wall or placed on elevated platforms that ran along the periphery of the room. Each gallery was painted in a bright 'Mexicolor', such as cobalt blue, terra-cotta, hot pink or sunny yellow. While the use of a 'fiesta' palette recalled stereotypical ideas about Mexico's colourful people and culture, this was largely undermined by the use of fine art exhibitionary techniques such as dramatic spot-lighting, minimalist labels providing each artist's name, the date of the work's execution, and the object type, as well as the insistence throughout that these objects were distinguished by their status as 'Masterpieces'. Large banners printed with photographs of the artisans working in their studios were hung from the ceiling and interspersed with digital projections that showed artists working while being interviewed about their craft. While these props presented views into often very rustic workshops, the conversations emphasised the unique craftsmanship of each 'Great Master'. All text and commentary throughout the exhibition was provided in Spanish and English translation, without privileging either.

1 This federally funded but autonomous organization was created by President Luis Echeverría in 1970 to provide low-interest credit lines to folk art producers. FONART then sells their products through wholesale retail outlets that it owns and manages throughout Mexico.

The positive spin on corporate sponsorship throughout the exhibition belies the ambivalent effects of both the Folk Art Support Program on folk artists and the integration of poor Mexicans on both sides of the border into the financial networks of transnational banks. As autonomous entrepreneurs, folk artists are increasingly vulnerable to the fluctuations of the global market, while poor consumers of banking services are subject to forms of debt and surveillance that they have historically averred. Critics of the *Great Masters* exhibition did raise concerns about banking politics and the Fomento's desire to further 'commercialise' folk art. For example, *Wall Street Journal* reporter Willard Spiegelman (2001) objected to the show's 'slick marketing' arguing the exhibit 'performs an artistic version of a NAFTA maneuver' (2001: A.20). Similarly, *New York Times* art critic Ken Johnson (2002) lamented the impact of 'global market forces' on the sanctity of authentic Mexican folk production, writing:

The problem is that the kind of local, rural or regional cultures from which folk art traditionally emerges and in which it thrives are everywhere being—or already have been—overtaken by global capitalism. This is a crisis for folk art: whereas it was once produced in small communities for the use of their own people, folk artists now produce hand-made luxury goods for high-end trade. (2002: E.30)

Suspicious of the 'fat, glossy exhibition catalog, with a text that reads like advertising copy', Johnson conjured commonplace truisms about the homogenising effects of the global art market on authentic ethnographic culture and the purported autonomy of art and the museum from economic systems of exchange.

Pace Johnson, scholars have demonstrated that the folk canon itself was constituted within a nexus of market considerations, from international economic and cultural exchange, to national development initiatives, to local attempts to negotiate the impact of these forces (Cordero Reiman, 1990; García Canclini, 1993; López, 2001). Moreover, James Oles (2002) argues that international exhibition has always been an important venue for marketing Mexican folk art to the world. Given this amply documented history, *Great Masters* represented more of the same. However, its display strategies and exhibitionary rhetoric deviated from these precedents. Through novel strategies, *Great Masters* produced a new regime of value for the exhibition, marketing, and consumption of Mexican Folk Art.

The Affective Economy of Great Masters: The Promise of Cultural Citizenship (?)

How did *Great Masters* constitute folk art as an expedient for the privatised support of the Mexican economy as well as an expression of cosmopolitan cultural citizenship? My second reading departs from an anthropological vantage. This approach views material culture as the objectification of social relations that externalises and thus makes visible the values and meanings embedded in social processes of identity formation, resistance, and the expression of difference. Objects don't merely answer to the needs of already constituted subjects; rather, they participate in the process of bringing subjects into being. My arguments in this vein are highly speculative and based (at this point) in anecdote and personal experience rather than empirical study. Nonetheless, the unprecedented nature of how people in the United States have responded to this

exhibition and to Mexico's 'Great Masters' suggests that we need to explore the affective economy of the neoliberal exhibition alongside political economic critiques of global blockbusters.

My interest in the affective dimension of *Great Masters* was prompted by the overwhelmingly positive reaction of my master's students when I assigned this exhibition in New York University's Graduate Program in Museum Studies in 2002. Since then I have been approached by US-based folk-art promoters – some working for non-profit non-governmental organisations (NGOs), others for commercial enterprises – who are eager to collaborate as insider-informants. The nearly unanimous message they relay is a deep identification with this art form, a critical awareness of the perils of neoliberalism, and a desire to foster sustainable growth at both the local and global level. And while at this stage I have not yet been able to pursue ethnographic research, empirical study of promoters, producers, and consumers will follow.

Finally, as a scholar and lover of Mexican art, I am implicated in the very processes I have spent the past eight years critiquing. What happens if we think through our own attachments and consumption? Does this change how we view the consuming habits or passions of others? Like a host of scholars working in material culture studies, I explore the paradoxical effects of globalisation on culture by balancing a critique of exploitation with an appreciation for how communities, citizens, and consumers are brought into being by these processes, and in turn how they may be reshaping them as well.

Great Masters constituted folk art as fine art and argued for its value as part of a collective inheritance in need of global support. To illustrate the novelty of *Great Masters* within the exhibitionary history of Mexican folk art, I compare it with the landmark 1940 exhibition *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* held at New York's Museum of Modern Art. Like *Great Masters*, *Twenty Centuries* was also motivated by US interests in Mexico, specifically the inter-American politics of a nascent, covert, Cold War cultural policy. The curators of *Twenty Centuries* inserted folk art into a chronological narrative of Mexican cultural history, presenting it as a living link between the nation's pre-Conquest archeological past and its modern artistic present. Proffered as an historical and authorless phenomenon, folk art's timelessness guaranteed the authenticity of the 'ethnised national' despite centuries of foreign domination and economic imperialism (López, 2001: 413). As organiser Roberto Montenegro explained in his catalogue essay, 'the objects which the Indian keeps for his own daily use are very different from the articles of commerce, whose low quality turns a pure and exquisite art into tourist curios of no great importance. That is the reason why our folk art, in every period, has served as a true symbol of the artistic instincts of the Mexican people' (Museum of Modern Art, 1940: 110).

Two representative catalogue entries for folk objects in the exhibition typify the logic on display. The entry for a 'modern' example of the 'earthenware pots' from Metepec, Mexico states, 'the ingenuity in decoration is typical of the native artist. He often imitates his own drawings, but never repeats them' (Museum of Modern Art, 1940: 115). Praising the ingenuity of the anonymous craftsman, the authors do not identify him beyond his status as a 'native'. Likewise, an entry for an example of the black pottery from Coyotepec, Oaxaca, reads, 'The sculptural reliefs on this type of pottery have an archaic character in keeping with their Mixtec origin' (1940: 132). At the time of the exhibition, black pottery was experiencing a boom revival, yet the entry directs us to the ancient origins of its form and iconography rather than acknowledging the living artisans actively engaged in the contemporary market from whence the example

surely came. Throughout the catalogue's illustrations, folk art objects are represented but not their makers.

By contrast, *Great Masters* focused on folk art exclusively and presented it as authored fine art. Whereas the curators of *Twenty Centuries* obscured the commercialisation of folk art by presenting the objects on display as authentic artefacts of the things 'the Indian keeps for himself', *Great Masters* celebrated its artists' participation in the global marketplace. Two catalogue entries typify this difference. The entry for master potter Oscar Soteno Elías begins by locating his workshop in Metepec. Noting that Soteno is the grandson of Modesta Fernández, a celebrated local artisan, and nephew of Monica and Tiburcio Soteno, 'recognised masters in the "trees of life"', the entry goes on to elaborate how Soteno's designs in this genre deviate from more traditional motifs while enumerating his participation in international exhibitions and fairs and the many awards he has garnered. While acknowledging the traditional materials and process he employs, the text also notes that Soteno does not use moulds or rely heavily on wire armatures in the manufacture of his sculptures. His hallowed genealogy authenticates his relationship to the regional tradition of polychromed *trees of life*, but it is his distinction as a colourist and technician that has elevated him to 'Great Master' status (Fomento Cultural Banamex, 1998: 139–140).

The entry for Margarita Cruz Sipuachi, a native of Coborachi in Chihuahua likewise narrates the handing down of tradition from her mother, the regional derivation of her materials, and the communal practices in which her *tesgüinera* pots have been used for generations. However, unlike the entry for Soteno, which emphasises his success within the global marketplace, that for Cruz Sipuachi stresses her economic need and virtual isolation from the global markets that might better sustain her community and practice. 'Since this activity is Margarita's only source of income', the authors write, 'she must strive to sell all of her pots, generally within her own village due to the lack of any other nearby communities' (Fomento Cultural Banamex, 1998: 121).

The narrative and visual strategies of these entries – professional full-page colour photographs of each artist with his or her work accompanies each text – reinforce the agenda of the Fomento: to use the exhibition to 'open new markets to revitalise the status of the handcraft as an income generating activity for the artisans and their families'. As such it is an exemplary instance of the role of museums in what James Clifford (1988) calls the 'Art–Culture System'. Through the agency of exhibition, folk art moved from the domain of 'authentic culture' to that of 'authentic art'. The select examples drawn from the Fomento collection were valued as much for their unique attributes as original masterpieces as for their links to community, genre, and tradition. However, unlike the examples Clifford surveys, the museum exhibition, in this case, promoted commercialisation rather than 'rescuing' these objects from the inauthentic category of commodity.

To view this simply as commodification, however, is too crude. Arjun Appadurai argues that the commodity is best understood as a phase within the social life of things (1986: 16). In this case, the museum takes what he calls 'commodities by destination' – that is things made to be sold – and metamorphoses them into 'ex-commodities' (1986: 16). Through the collecting activities of the Fomento Folk Art Support Program, the folk objects on display were retrieved from the commodity state and converted into masterpieces of Mexican folk art. Selected as unique examples within a class of objects made for use and sale, their collection and display enacted a symbolic transformation that autonomised these examples to better commercialise others within their class.

Fred Myers (2001) argues that the implication of ethnographic arts within market systems does not necessarily erase other forms of distinction. 'The market's domination', he writes, 'is never complete: other systems of value may coexist, and their meaning may be reconstructed in relation to the presence of market practices' (2001: 59).

When *Great Masters* went on view at the MFACM the relationship between folk art, collecting, and globalisation was highlighted in the public programming and press coverage. Speaking to a *Chicago Tribune* reporter, Visual Arts Director Cesareo Moreno argued that the 'adaptability' demonstrated by the 'fusion' of Native American, Asian, Moorish, and European styles in Talavera pottery had prepared artisans for the demands of the twenty-first century marketplace. 'Now the role of the artisan has gone international', Moreno explained, 'the artesano has moved with the times and gone from local to global. It is part of this adaptive, creative quality that is so intrinsic to the Mexican. The pieces are more like works of art today and they now sell them to collectors' (Daniels, 2002: 15.1). To facilitate this 'adaptability' the museum sponsored a Collectors' Forum in which folk art experts and local collectors discussed their passion for Mexican crafts while also addressing modes of purchase.

Norma Garcia, a mental health worker and museum board member, described her collecting activities as a product of her 'love' for her 'own culture' (Daniels, 2002: 15.1). Celebrity chef Rick Bayless enthused about the 'whimsy' and 'spontaneity' of the folk objects he displays at his two high-end Mexican restaurants, Frontera Grill and Topolobampo (Daniels, 2002: 15). John Venator, president and CEO of the Computing Technology Industry Association, praised the exhibition catalogue, calling it 'a Bible for collecting' and noted that the MFACM's shop and Collector's Corner offered both 'reasonably priced' and 'high-end stuff'. The 'ultimate' way to collect folk art, he exclaimed, was to take a trip to Mexico City or Oaxaca to commission pieces directly from artisans while touring their workshops (Daniels, 2002: 15). Susan Danly, curator of *Casa Mañana*, a concurrent exhibition of the Morrow folk art collection on view at Amhurst College, explained that there were a number of internet outlets for folk art, citing Novica.com for its 'above average quality at affordable prices' (Daniels, 2002: 15).

The comments by the participants in the Collectors' Forum reveal the connection between expressive identity, consumption, and what John Urry calls the 'service class' (2002: 80–81). This class is defined by its cultural rather than economic capital, involvement in symbolic work i.e. media, advertising, design, or industries that 'service' capital, commitment to fashion, and an ethic of pleasure that is caught up with forms of self-(bodily)expression as a mode of communication. Witness the occupations and description of motives cited at the Collectors' Forum: a Latina social worker/museum board member who values folk art as an expression of her cultural identity; a chef who employs it as an extension of the authentic gustatory pleasures of his renowned Mexican cuisine; and an Internet impresario who describes the ludic joys of purchase and travel that the consumption of folk art entails for the modern subject.

Proxies for the consumers the exhibition sought to cultivate, these individuals model the 'aesthetic cosmopolitanism' that Urry (1995) argues is a characteristic of modern societies. 'Such a cosmopolitanism', he writes, 'presupposes extensive patterns of mobility, a stance of openness toward others, a willingness to take risks and an ability to reflect upon and judge aesthetically between different natures, places and societies, both now and in the past' (1995: 145). Urry links aesthetic cosmopolitanism to a novel form of 'consumer citizenship' that 'increasingly involves claims to consume other cultures and places throughout the world' (1995: 165).

For Urry, the museum is a 'consuming place' where other locales, peoples, and realities are offered up for the visual consumption of 'virtual' tourists; this in turn normalises and familiarises the forms of imaginative or corporeal travel entailed by the rights of consumer citizenship. *Great Masters* helped to produce the imaginative pleasure necessary for the consumption of folk art either at the museum, through the Internet, or on a trip to 'Mexico City or Oaxaca'. Entering into its brightly coloured galleries and gazing upon objects representing 'every region' of the Mexican Republic was akin to travel South of the Border. However, the emphasis within the didactics on the role of collecting in rescuing, reviving and sustaining folk art linked this consumption to an ethic of citizenship that is cosmopolitan, rather than national or parochial.

Within this formulation, globalisation signifies a demand for local cultural difference, *not* homogeneity. Martin Hall describes this demand as the 'reappearance of the authentic' within the age of simulation (2006: 70–101). Museums, he argues, are now part of an emergent 'experience economy/complex' in which objects are removed from circulation as commodities to anchor the simulation of a destination in 'the real'. Objects 'enclaved' in this way insure against viewer disillusion with simulated experience when that experience seems to be similar to experiences available elsewhere. Hill writes:

The requirements of the experiential complex are prompting a sort of reverse engineering of authenticity. Rather than appropriating original works of art, reproductions need to be invested with aura through evidence of their rarity and the 'trace' of history. (2006: 94)

Because the enclaved object requires the 'trace' of history to anchor experience within the real, ethnographic materials have 'a particular saliency' (Hill, 2006: 95). Hill's insight into the dependency of simulation on material culture helps us to better understand why folk art had to be endowed with the 'aura' of the masterpiece in order for the exhibition to appeal to the culturally savvy consumers of the service class. Without this aura, there would have been nothing to distinguish this exhibition or these objects from the myriad FONART stores or Internet outlets that sell others of their class. It was the lure of the authentic that brought visitors to the museum and that added value to the experience of Mexico it simulated.

I return now to the ethic of consumption implied within the exhibition's didactics, at the Collectors' Forum and in some of the travel journalism that shadowed the exhibition. This ethic was structured by the deterritorialised and affective claims of 'cultural citizenship'. Drawing from psychoanalytic and Marxist theory, Sarah Ahmed has coined the phrase 'affective economy' to capture the way that emotions (or affect) 'circulate and are distributed across a social as well as psychic field' (2004: 120). While feelings seem to reside within the subject or an object, Ahmed suggests that affect is produced through the circulation of emotions between signs, objects, and subjects. Ahmed focuses on how the emotion of hate circulates through discourses about racial others, immigration, and terrorism to produce the affect of love for and belonging to the US, conceived of as a white nation. Hate and fear, she argues, 'secure forms of the collective' and the individual subject comes into being through its alignment with that collective (2004: 128).

While Ahmed focuses on the role of affect in securing distinctions between 'in here' and 'out there' that constitute national imaginaries, I invoke her phrase to capture a counter movement. The circulation of feelings I am interested in may have the potential to erode or bridge the gap between 'in here' and 'out there' that once differentiated the United States from the Mexican nation. I am suggesting that a supranational

imaginary – the global Mexican – is affected through the love and admiration that circulates between consumers, folk culture, and the signs of authenticity and regimes of value that the *Great Masters* exhibition instantiated. These affective economies are concurrent, and while hate often trumps love, the latter nonetheless exists and works against the distinction generating forces of hate.

When Rick Bayless declared his ‘love’ for Mexican folk art at the Collectors’ Forum, he elaborated, saying, ‘It really captures something special about the human experience that you just don’t find in a lot of other art’ (Daniels, 2002: 15.1). Likewise, Craig Venator exclaimed, ‘It is challenging, it is strong, it is raw, it is vital. It just gets us, it grabs us’ (Daniels, 2002: 15.1). In contradistinction to hate this love for folk art has the capacity to organise a different collective and to thereby generate different subjects. This love has an ethical dimension that the exhibition objectified, but did not produce. For that we need to return to the reorganisation of national imaginaries and notions of citizenship that neoliberalism effects.

Myers reminds us that, ‘national imaginaries ... are tied to changing political economies and are produced by specific social sectors’ (2001: 191). Since the post-Revolutionary cultural renaissance, folk artists have been essential to the production of an ethnicised national imaginary. As García Canclini argues, under Mexico’s state-directed capitalism, folk art ‘solved’ the problem of rural unemployment, revitalised consumption through the production of difference, ‘reconcil[e] backwardness with beauty’ for the purposes of tourism, and did ideological work for the nation-state (2000: 37–47). Two decades of the privatisation of the Mexican economy has altered this national imaginary. This change is evident in the way Mexican national patrimony is being marketed to foreign tourists and consumers.

Within post-NAFTA Mexico, folk art production, and consumption are rationalised through the neoliberal values of self-support, individual responsibility and ethical choice. This is nowhere more apparent than in the English-language signs posted at the cashier stands in the gift stores at Mexico’s National Anthropology Museum, where visitors are encouraged by museum-quality displays to purchase folk art. These read: ‘a gift from the museum is a gift to the museum. Your purchase supports the preservation of the world’s cultural heritage in Mexico’. Consumption is presented as a choice that globally conscious visitors make. Their purchase supports not only the museum, but also the *world’s* cultural heritage – a global inheritance that happens to be located in Mexico.

This ethos – that I am characterising as a cosmopolitan form of cultural citizenship that follows from the privatisation of Mexico’s economy and culture – is also evident in the ways consumers talk about their own consumption. Over the three years that the exhibition travelled, an avalanche of articles appeared in US newspapers describing the joys and relative ease of folk art tourism with an emphasis on shopping as individualised economic stimulus. For example, Bruce Selcraig (2001), writing for the *Washington Post* surveyed the regional traditions of Oaxaca’s valley towns, discussing textile weavers from Teotitlán, such as Arnulfo Mendoza, master woodcarver, Manuel Jiménez from Arrazola, and the Aguilar sisters, ceramicists from Ocotlán whose Frida Kahlo figurines were featured prominently in the *Great Masters* exhibition. Selcraig situated his own ‘folk art buying forays’ to Oaxaca within a history of foreign collecting and its impact on the local folk art economy (2001: E.1). Characterising folk art tourism as a form of ethical consumption he asks rhetorically, ‘what better way to directly pump money into one of Mexico’s poorest states?’ (2001: E.1). If we recall the entry for Sipuachi, in

which her isolation from global markets laid the burden of consumption at the feet of her own community, we can see how this ethic subtended the exhibition as well.

The consuming subject that *Great Masters* appealed to was a cosmopolitan but affective Mexican, a citizen of the world who feels herself connected through an ethos of responsibility to the Fomento Folk Art Support Program's project to sustain Mexican folk art and artisans. This citizen does not assume that it is the obligation of the Mexican state to subsidise its culture industries or provide the social services necessary to safeguard the welfare of its citizenry. Rather, she answers the neoliberal call for privatised subvention and buys a work of folk art from a 'Master'. Endowed by the exhibition with the requisite skill to make informed aesthetic judgments within the field of Mexican crafts, she brings to her purchase a cosmopolitan sense of her rights and responsibilities as a global citizen. And while aesthetic cosmopolitanism is often cosmetic and even exploitative, the forms of subjectivity it creates and the social affinities it cultivates contain the potential for more radical forms of cultural identification and citizenship.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has teased out the paradoxes between the economic realities of a global market economy and attempts to make world cultural heritage an 'engine of economic development by adding value to cultural assets that are not otherwise economically sustainable locally or globally' (2006: 163). Noting that the very concept of 'world heritage' emerged as a consequence of globalisation, not as its antidote, she argues that, nonetheless, it envisions and constitutes 'a global polity within the space of a global cultural commons' (2006: 161). The goal of world heritage initiatives are to 'promote a sense of global solidarity and transnational identification' among the cosmopolitan citizens to which it appeals (2006: 191). This global civil society is predicated on the democratic public sphere, however, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett notes, 'globalisation is producing a sphere of competitive economic actors more effectively than it is creating citizens with equal rights' (2006: 192). The two forces work against one another. And thus far, the market's capacity to create inequality and exploit those inequalities for profit is far outpacing cosmopolitan cultural citizenship's attempts to expand human rights, promote peace, and generate prosperity for the communities or groups whose diversity constitutes the very assets leveraged by the global cultural economy.

And yet, I insist that the capacity of cultural heritage to create supranational 'communitarian attachments' cannot be dismissed simply because it is partially subsumed by the market. These attachments matter, and they are never entirely contained or controlled by the forces of capital. I return to *Great Masters* and to the creative labour of the people who form attachments to folk art and respond to the call for economic support. Certainly, they are servicing capital as the citizen-subjects neoliberalism exalts. But their desire to honour and safeguard the 'world's cultural heritage in Mexico' forges the kind of commonality or 'communitarian attachments' that Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues is necessary for a more democratic global commons in which difference is not merely celebrated, but also protected and tolerated even when at cross-purposes to political and economic agendas.

It is possible to imagine a circumstance when our ability to tolerate global exploitation to safeguard markets might be challenged by an opposing desire to safeguard difference, at the expense of profit or political control. I would argue that with respect to Latino/as that time is here, despite the ritualised rhetorical grandstanding of politicians. We have been witnessing the production of value around Latino/a culture and citizenship and a partial transformation of commonsense notions of citizenship from a mono-cultural

and parochial register to a supranational dimension that does not respect the bounded territorial imaginary of the Anglo nation-state. The US insists on arming the border and establishing rigid controls over what constitutes citizenship, and yet everywhere there is evidence that the citizenry is already understood to be significantly and irrevocably Latinised. This is in part what continues to incentivise Latino/a programming in museums and what certainly made the *Great Masters* exhibition appealing to the three museums that agreed to host it.

Cynics want us to believe that this is merely an empty capitulation to market demands, that our participation within this economy is always already circumscribed by the agendas of corporations and neoliberal governments, that exploitation is all encompassing, and that all action is impotent. This argument, nurtured by political economic critiques like that in my first reading, minimises or plainly discounts the politics of affect and its diffuse but expansive power to change subjectivity and produce value. To lose sight of these changes, their radical promise and potential, is to surrender to the very attempts to control and colonise subjectivity implicit within 'cultural citizenship's uptake as a site of governmentality' (Miller, 2001: 5).

To acknowledge the creativity and productive capacity of affect to radically act upon and transform our notions of what is common, does not discount a critique of *Great Masters*. I stand by my first reading and its insight into how global capitalism exploits culture and subjects. However, as an account of globalisation and its coercive effects, my first reading should be considered alongside the second, so that we do not lose sight of the expansive and transformative effects of affective economies. I conclude by re-invoking Miller's hopeful speculation that cultural citizenship's 'uptake as a crucial site of governmentality' has the potential to generate more radical citizenship claims. It is this *potential* that *Great Masters* suggested through its objectification of the economic, social, and cultural relations that connect Mexican artisans with global consumers.

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'Banking on Folk Art'

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Mary K. Coffey

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