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Contesting Representations of Gender and Womanhood in Mexico

by

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Introduction

“Sometimes I wanted to say something, and photography didn’t fully allow me to do it. So I’d take a sheet of cardboard, make a drawing, select the negatives, print them the necessary size, then cut and paste.”¹ These words by Lola Álvarez Bravo (1903–1993) set the stage for thinking about the often-ignored section of her photographic oeuvre: photomontage. Álvarez Bravo created approximately thirty photomontages during the span of her fifty-year career,² and considered the medium to be a new way to craft multilayered narratives in a manner she could not with standard photography. As argued throughout this thesis, Álvarez Bravo turned to photomontage during targeted periods during her career to challenge prevailing perceptions of feminity and motherhood. In a different manner than in straight photography, the narratives that she created within her photomontage compositions often displayed a tension between tradition and modernization that existed with regard to women and gender roles. A close analysis of eight photomontages produced between 1935 to the last photomontage printed in 1958 show that Álvarez Bravo created manufactured compositions in order to address issues of gender roles in a different manner than straight photography. The compositions Álvarez Bravo created make evident the manifold ways she represented gender as a contested, political, and personal concern.

Such a focus on gender and photomontage has not been an integral part of the recent scholarship on Álvarez Bravo’s photography. The several articles and talks given on her most famous photomontages have provided essential background information and a look into the


² Approximate number based on the holdings at the Lola Álvarez Bravo Archive at the Center for Creative Photography. There may be several photomontages that have been lost and/or wrongly attributed to other artists. See the Lola Álvarez Bravo Archive, 1901–1994, AG 154, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona.
sociopolitical climate within which Álvarez Bravo was making her photomontages. In this study, which places gender at center of the analysis, I divide her photomontages into three groups that reveal diverse concerns about female agency in this time of social transformation.

The first group of photomontages, *El Sueño del los Pobres* (*The Dream of the Poor*, 1935) and *El Capital Hambriente de Sobre Trabajo* (*Capital, Hungry from Overwork*, 1935), were commissioned for and published in the pages of the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP)—funded magazine *El Maestro Rural* (1932–40, hereafter EMR) in April 1935. This grouping pays special attention to the sociopolitical concerns of the 1930s. The second group of photomontages, *Hilados del Norte I* (*Factories of the North I*, 1944), *Hilados del Norte II* (*Factories of the North II*, 1944), and *Anarquía Arquitectónica de la Cuidad de México* (*Architectural Anarchy in Mexico City*, 1953), were all printed as photomurals. They map the rise of modernity during the mid-1940s into the early 1950s and the gendered body’s role within it. The final set of photomontages, *Universidad Femenina* (*Women’s University*, 1943), *El Sueño del Ahogado* (*Dream of the Drowned*, 1945) and *Sirenas del Aire* (*Mermaids of the Air*, c.1940s, printed 1958), chart gender differences in the 1940s and are arguably Álvarez Bravo’s most personal expressions of feminine identity. These later photomontages, which evidence a dialogue with Surrealism, are the most experimental of all, which is perhaps the reason why they are the least studied by scholars.

There are few articles and books that discuss this body of Álvarez Bravo’s work. The most notable sources discussing the photomontages are: James Oles’s recent talk on Lola Álvarez Bravo as the forgotten muralist at the CUNY Graduate Center, New York, in 2016, Elizabeth Ferrer’s brief description of the most popular photomontages in her monograph *Lola Alvarez Bravo* (New York: Aperture, 2006), and Oliver Debroise’s essays “Los Fotomontajes de Lola Álvarez Bravo” in *Lola Álvarez Bravo, Reencuentros: 150 Años de la Fotografía México* (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Museo Estudio Diego Rivera, 1989), 9–16 and “Fantasía” in *Mexican Suite*, 234–244.
The scholarship on Álvarez Bravo tends to emphasize her contributions as a photojournalist who captured rural and cosmopolitan Mexicans alike and the striking portrait photographs she made, most notably those of Frida Kahlo. The literature has also primarily focused on Álvarez Bravo’s biography rather than offering a thorough investigation into photographs she took and the photomontages she created. The most comprehensive resources on Álvarez Bravo include the 1992 monograph titled, *Lola Álvarez Bravo: Fotografías Selectas, 1934–1985*. This volume includes several essays and reproductions of correspondence that are helpful in locating information about the various commissions Álvarez Bravo received, her professional, artistic, and personal relationships, and the positions she held throughout her lifetime. Similar to many of the other monographs, *Fotografías Selectas* only sparsely discusses Álvarez Bravo’s photomontages. Elizabeth Ferrer’s 2006 monograph *Lola Alvarez Bravo*, one of the first written in English, provides key contextual and biographical information about the artist. Ferrer offers details on the various professional positions Álvarez Bravo held as an independent, pioneering working photographer, once she separated from her husband in 1934.

4 See, for example, the exhibition catalogue, *Frida Kahlo Photographs* (Dallas: Society of Friends of the Mexican Culture, 1992).

5 There are several monographic studies on Álvarez Bravo written in both English and Spanish that discuss her importance as a photojournalist, portraitist, and teacher. See *Lola Álvarez Bravo: Fotografías Selectas, 1934–1985* (Mexico City: Centro Cultural/Arte Contemporáneo, 1992); Oliver Debroise, *Lola Álvarez Bravo: In Her Own Light* (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, 1994); and Ferrer, *Lola Alvarez Bravo*.

6 Claudia Canales’s essay in the monograph published nine photomontages in very small format on two pages. In those two pages, Canales speaks very briefly about the fantastic aspect of the photomontages, then moves on to discuss Álvarez Bravo’s portrait photographs. See Claudia Canales, “Mirar a Quien Mira: Las Fotografías de Lola Álvarez Bravo,” in *Lola Álvarez Bravo: Fotografías Selectas*, 40–41.

7 Ferrer notes that Álvarez Bravo had several jobs to provide for her and her son. When she first separated from her husband, Álvarez Bravo lived with the artist María Izquierdo for five years.
Ferrer’s study is paramount for understanding the various professional relationships Álvarez Bravo cultivated during her career, including with the artist María Izquierdo. Both of these studies, while extensive, do not delve into Álvarez Bravo’s photomontage production with attention to gender. While it is imperative to understand that Álvarez Bravo holds an important place in Mexico during the post-Revolutionary period as Mexico’s only female photographer to have a productive career that spanned close to fifty years—a difficult feat in the phallocentric medium—it is equally important to free her from her biography. For this reason, this study focuses exclusively on her work, and specifically the understudied photomontage production.

Oliver Debroise’s writings on Álvarez Bravo provide a thorough history of the artist and her oeuvre. Debroise was one of the first to comb through Álvarez Bravo’s negatives, advocate for their safekeeping within the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, Arizona, and provide insight into Álvarez Bravo’s personal history through interviews with the artist. In addition, Debroise’s 1989 catalogue Reencuentros: 150 Años de la Fotografía México is an important source, publishing two of the photomontages produced in Álvarez Bravo’s studio during the mid-1940s for the first time. Within the catalogue, Debroise takes time to discuss photomontage in Mexico and to insert Álvarez Bravo within the narrative, while also providing comparisons to other artists like Diego Rivera, by drawing parallels in subject matter, scale, and

until she was able to support herself and her son. This fact speaks to Álvarez Bravo’s feminist politics, seen in later chapters. See Ferrer, Lola Álvarez Bravo, 16–20.

8 Debroise’s writing on Álvarez Bravo has provided invaluable information about Álvarez Bravo’s long-spanning career. See, for example, Lola Álvarez Bravo: In Her Own Light; Lola Álvarez Bravo, Reencuentros; and Mexican Suite.

9 El Sueño del Ahogado and Universidad Femenina were published in this catalogue and subsequently exhibited in the exhibition in 1989. Debroise notes when discussing El Sueño del Ahogado, that “no fue, hasta donde se sabe, publicado.” See Debroise, Lola Álvarez Bravo, Reencuentros, 14.
rhythm within compositions, perhaps to elevate the status of photomontage. While Debroise discusses Álvarez Bravo’s photomontage production in several of his other texts, he does not examine their depiction of gender; instead, these texts focus on Álvarez Bravo’s indebtedness to figures like Rivera, María Izquierdo, or to other photographers like Manuel Álvarez Bravo.

The most important source of information for the study of Álvarez Bravo’s photomontages, however, has been the archive kept by the photographer herself in her small apartment on Avenida Juárez in Mexico City. The archive was eventually sold to the Center for Creative Photography (CCP) in 1992, before the artist moved into her Colonia Roma apartment, which had been newly designed by her friend, the architect Luis Barragán. The CCP archive includes the most comprehensive Álvarez Bravo archive. It includes extensive files of negatives from throughout her career, biographical materials, clippings, and publications. The current archive at the CCP, which has been carefully preserved and classified in the way Álvarez Bravo originally stored her negatives, is rich in what she considered to be her true body of work. The archive houses several photomontage negatives, including some for in-progress

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10 Ibid., 15.


12 Álvarez Bravo left several suitcases and negatives behind, thereby leaving a section of the archive incomplete and unstudied until 2013. This “left-behind archive” makes up the current archive of the Colección Familia Redón. See James Oles and Adriana Zavala, “The González Rendón Archive” in Rachael Arauz, Adriana Zavala, and James Oles, *Lola Álvarez Bravo: The Photography of an Era* (Barcelona: RM, 2013), 14–15.

13 As Elizabeth Ferrer notes, Álvarez Bravo produced many thousands of negatives over the course of her career that are now preserved at the CCP. Of these images, she considered only a portion to be her true body of work; those that she felt best expressed her vision of Mexico. These negatives, approximately 1,600, were then labeled and placed in boxes named “Favorite Pieces of Lola” at the CCP. See Ferrer, *Lola Alvarez Bravo*, 43.
photomontages.¹⁴ Unfortunately, clear dates do not exist for some of the photomontages, including *Sirenas del Aire*. Moreover, the archive does not include every photomontage that Álvarez Bravo created, as many of the originals were lost.

The most in-depth studies of several photomontages are the essays written by Johanna Spanke, Deborah Dorotinsky, and Cristóbal Andrés Jácome in the 2013 exhibition catalogue *Lola Álvarez Bravo: The Photography of an Era*, by Rachael Arauz, Adriana Zavala, and James Oles.¹⁵ Jácome’s two essays provide important context for Álvarez Bravo’s industrial photomontages and her attention to architecture.¹⁶ He identifies many of the buildings that Álvarez Bravo reproduced within her compositions and outlines the wide distribution of her photocollages. Spanke’s essay, in turn, teases out connections between her two earliest photomontages, *El Sueño de Los Pobres* and *El Capital Hambriento de Sobre Trabajo*, and Modernist movements in Europe.¹⁷ While more general than other essays in the catalogue, Spanke’s essay highlights photomontages that had been newly discovered in the González

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¹⁴ For example Álvarez Bravo’s archive contains ten photomontage sleeves: unidentified (industrial elements, rows of cars); unidentified (brain, industrial elements); *Sirenas del Aire*, 1958; *Ferrocarriles*, 1955; *Universidad Femenina*, 1943; *Abriendo Caminos*, 1948; *Computadora*, 1954; unidentified (figures carved in stone, tree, shoreline, boat); *El Sueño del Ahogado*, 1945; and unidentified (image with foliage and jaguar). Series 2, Box 12, Envelope 2, Lola Álvarez Bravo Archive, 1901–1994, AG 154, Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona.

¹⁵ This catalogue served as a survey of the Colección Familia Redón, a previously unknown archive that has many original photomontages thought to be lost.


Rendón archive. Finally, the essay by Dorotinsky on Álvarez Bravo’s contribution to the educational magazine *EMR* discusses the two photomontages showcased within the magazine. She provides important background details about the content of the magazine, its purpose as one of the populist programs that flourished during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–40), and the message that Álvarez Bravo meant to convey in each of the photomontages.

Although these essays provide significant information on the photomontages that Álvarez Bravo produced during her career, they do not shed light on the topic of gender. This thesis thus adds to extant research in two areas. First, by dividing Álvarez Bravo’s photomontages into thematic groupings, it allows for a closer investigation into the space that each of these photomontages occupied in their sociopolitical and physical environments and contributed to the established dialogue. Second, by analyzing each photomontage with special attention to the depiction of women or men and their societal roles, it offers a keen look into Álvarez Bravo’s concern with gender politics, which were expressed either by iconography, form, or recasting types, shedding light on the artist’s feminist politics.

Aside from existing monographs, several sources discuss the relationship between Surrealism and photography in the artist’s oeuvre, which is relevant to the third chapter of this thesis. The 2012 catalogue for the Los Angeles County Museum of Art exhibition, *In Wonderland: The Surrealist Adventures of Women Artists in Mexico and the United States*, helpfully places several of Álvarez Bravo’s photomontages within the Surrealist lexicon. Especially useful is Tere Arcq’s essay, “In the Land of Convulsive Beauty,” in which she briefly

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18 This study does not include the newly discovered photomontage, *Paisajes de México I y II*, which Spanke discusses in her essay.

discusses two of Álvarez Bravo’s photomontages. Whitney Chadwick argues in several instances that Surrealism gave many female adherents the opportunity to discuss gender critically under the guise of the movement by “establishing new parameters within which women artists might begin to explore the complex and ambiguous relationship between the female body and female identity.” These parameters included domesticity, family, and motherhood, which were often presented in a harrowing manner by many women surrealists.

Before discussing the photomontages that Álvarez Bravo created, I first trace Álvarez Bravo’s artistic formation during the immediate post-Revolutionary period, her photographic career, and note how the photomontages fit into her overall oeuvre. It was during the late 1920s and early 1930s—a period when the vibrancy of the cultural renewal brought on by the end of the Revolution was inspiring and influencing young artists and intellectuals—that Álvarez Bravo began her photographic career in southern Mexico under the watchful eye of her then-husband, Manuel Álvarez Bravo. The Revolution, which effectively concluded in 1920 with the appointment of Álvaro Obregón as president, necessitated efforts to strive to unify the nation after a decade of endured violence and political chaos. Within the vibrancy of promised transformation, the Mexican state and intellectuals turned to Mexico’s marginalized peasant class


21 Ibid., 27.


23 Ferrer, Lola Alvarez Bravo, 12.
to rediscover traditions and values that were independent of European influences and to employ them as symbols. Álvarez Bravo, inspired by the nationalist rhetoric, took part in this profound interest in the rural and indigenous population that had been encouraged by the state directly following the Revolution by photographing the rural classes in Oaxaca from 1925–1927.

Once separated from her husband in 1934 Álvarez Bravo landed her first position as chief photographer—a job she held in 1935–36—for EMR, a monthly magazine the SEP published primarily aimed at elementary school teachers. The periodical required her to capture images of rural schools, children in classrooms, livestock, and social activities. It was through these assignments that Álvarez Bravo learned composition, producing works that followed Constructivist photography in the strain of Aleksandr Rodchenko (Russian, 1891–1956). Using tight cropping and somewhat unconventional camera angles, Álvarez Bravo captured many dynamic points of view in her commissions for EMR. It was also during 1935 that she began to experiment with photomontage, making pieces that addressed issues of gender and socioeconomic disparity for the magazine.


25 The early photographs captured by Álvarez Bravo are difficult to distinguish from Manuel Álvarez Bravo’s because they shared the same darkroom. Moreover, many of these early images are lost. It is possible that several images that have been identified as Manuel Álvarez Bravo are actually by Lola Álvarez Bravo. See Ferrer, Lola Alvarez Bravo, 46.

26 The magazine was also one of several socialist education periodicals that were created in the early 1930s during the Narisco Bassols’s term as Minister of Education. See Debroise, “Like Cut Glass,” 19.

The chapters in this thesis are organized thematically, which allows for the tracing of Álvarez Bravo’s development of photomontage in specific moments across her career and the different ways in which concerns with gender manifest in her photomontages. Chapter one discusses the two photomontages printed in the same 1935 issue of *EMR*. It charts the early stages of Álvarez Bravo’s photographic career and her first exploration of photomontage. These compositions indicate the politicized climate of the post-Revolutionary period in their address of the economic plight faced by the working classes and of defined gender roles. The two photomontages discussed in this first chapter show that Álvarez Bravo crafted her own narrative of gender and motherhood outside the mandated SEP iconography, which often featured physically fit women or doting mothers. By doing so, she also critiqued gender expectations of mid-1930s society. While these early photomontages do not openly address issues of gender, neither through iconography nor form, Álvarez Bravo’s feminist politics emerge outside of the narrative that she was required to adopt by the SEP, with which she did not necessarily agree.

Chapter two discusses Álvarez Bravo’s photomontage production during the mid-1940s, when job opportunities for the post-Revolutionary government began to wane. As a result, Álvarez Bravo made art that was less concerned with state politics and more focused on Mexico’s burgeoning industry.28 Álvarez Bravo not only documented the changing geographical landscape through straight photography, but she also began to make photomontages that were later printed as large-scale murals to adorn office buildings, be installed in museums, or become

backdrops for film sets. The iconography of these photomurals evince Álvarez Bravo’s position on gender by either small inclusions of male bodies, mythic-like male workers, or the complete absence of humanity. These strategies all hint at the departure from canonical representations of the male worker, popularized by Álvarez Bravo’s contemporaries, seen by small inclusions of factory workers, or the male worker pictured in industrial scenes without agency. Key to this analysis is the gendered body in the landscape and the varying degrees of masculinity Álvarez Bravo ascribed to her male figures. Additionally gender can be discussed and observed in the sites where the photomurals functioned and the environment for which they were designed, which were male dominated boardrooms or film sets.

The third chapter discusses three photomontages executed within the artist’s studio for her personal use during the 1940s. While all of the examples cited above were made for commission-based projects, those discussed in this final chapter were made by the artist for her own formal and conceptual experimentation and exhibited as a group some thirty or forty years after they were made (four years before Álvarez Bravo’s death). These three studio works openly and critically address gender by portraying female bodies as active agents of modernism, and showing women taking active societal roles such as contributors to scientific fields. Their form and iconography reveal a more overt criticism of gender.

29 *Hilados del Norte I* and *Hilados del Norte II* were displayed as large-scale murals. *Espacios* magazine shows an installation view of *Hilados del Norte II* in the boardroom of the AutoMex offices in Monterrey. *Anarquía Arquitectónica de la Ciudad de Mexico* was displayed as a backdrop of the 1955 film *La Rival*.

30 The three photomontages were shown in the exhibition, *150 Años de la Fotografía* curated by Oliver Debroise in 1989. All three were published in Debroise, *Lola Álvarez Bravo: Reencuentros* (38) and shown in the exhibition *150 Años de la Fotografía* at the Museo Estudio Diego Rivera that same year.
The overarching argument of this text, threaded throughout each chapter, is that Álvarez Bravo’s photomontages recast traditional, mythical, and folkloric depictions of femininity to fit to her own critical interpretations of womanhood. There are instances discussed throughout this thesis in which Álvarez Bravo presents, questions, and challenges struggles and tensions regarding gender in Mexico. Each thematic and chronological grouping of photomontages notes the gendered space that Álvarez Bravo occupied as a woman, an artist, and a Mexican citizen, as well as the gendered spaces, in the instances of the EMR and murals, in which her photomontages circulated and were displayed. In each of these groups of photomontages, Álvarez Bravo critiqued gender through nuanced representations of motherhood, of the male body in the landscape, and of reinterpretations of traditional images of womanhood.
Chapter One

Photomontage in Print: El Maestro Rural Magazine and the Critique of Ideals of Women and Children

Photographers in Mexico used photomontage during the 1930s because they found its ability to create uncanny, rhetorical juxtapositions to be useful for propaganda.\(^{31}\) This characteristic is most evident in the political photomontages by Lola Álvarez Bravo that were published in *EMR* (1932–40) in 1935 and *Frente a Frente* in 1938, and in the numerous photomontages by Enrique Gutmann that appeared in the magazine *Futuro* during the mid-1930s.\(^{32}\) This chapter discusses Álvarez Bravo’s creation of photomontages for the pages of *EMR*, which addressed two major issues: the oppressed working-class campesino and the histories of oppressed women. In addressing these themes in two photomontages, *El Sueño de los Pobres (Dream of the Poor, Figure 1.1)* and *El Capital Hambriento de Sobre Trabajo (Capital Hungry from Overwork, Figure 1.2)*, Álvarez Bravo critiques gender norms in a different manner than straight photography, where she creates the visage of traditional nurturing female figures and heroic males to adhere to mainstream narratives, but also takes time to complicate these histories. Through photomontage, she created uncanny juxtapositions, manufacturing compositions that conveyed political messages that standard photography could not.


\(^{32}\) For example, Enrique Gutmann and Francisco Toledo created numerous political photomontages that illustrated marches, political demonstrations, and strikes for the magazine *Futuro*, the editorial arm of the Universidad Obrera de México founded in 1933. For more discussion of the use of political photomontage in Mexico during the 1930s, see Salvador Albiñana and Horacio Fernández, “La Óptica Moderna: La Fotografía en México entre 1923 y 1940,” *Caravelle*, no. 80 (2003): 18–19, 63–81, and Debroise, *Mexican Suite*, 238.
This chapter investigates the framing of Álvarez Bravo’s photomontages within the gendered magazine *EMR*, and as a site to view her critical points of gender that were slipped into propagandistic images. These two photomontages, which appear on the same page in the April 15, 1935 issue, not only represented the rampant socioeconomic inequality experienced by the proletariat, but also highlighted inequality faced by women. Through close readings of both photomontages within the gendered space of *EMR*, a multilayered narrative emerges that suggests Álvarez Bravo’s feminist politics.

Revolutionary officials produced an overwhelming body of propaganda with the intention of instructing adults on how to raise the ideal national citizen. In print magazines such as *EMR*, which the state distributed to rural teachers, educators found instructions on how to engage with students using various artistic media and how to combat enemies such as disease and illiteracy through hygiene and reading. For these periodicals, the SEP employed photographers like Álvarez Bravo, vanguard artists, writers, and teachers to create photographs, photomontages, woodcuts, stories, and plays that could be easily understood by children, could be practically used in the classroom, and supported the objectives of the SEP. Its goals were, as a Deborah Dorotinsky notes, “to strive to promote the educational ideals of the Ministry, to communicate to

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and among all rural teachers through their works and news stories, and at the same time to offer useful articles for children and adults who lived in rural communities.”

The SEP magazine for which Álvarez Bravo worked and contributed photomontages played a specific role in 1930s Mexico. Revolutionary officials produced an overwhelming body of propaganda intended to instruct adults on child rearing techniques to amply raise Mexico’s youth. This notion of raising and rearing the ideal Mexican citizen—who was productive, hygienic, and ideologically committed—was disseminated to the nation’s mothers, schoolteachers, and community members through literature published by the SEP. The pivotal and gendered role of mothers and schoolteachers as makers of the ideal niño proletario (proletarian child) was arguably inculcated through the images and text of EMR. Culturally-centered, didactic projects were designed to socialize the proletarian masses so they could be integrated into Mexican society. The SEP, the main proponent of this cultural program, employed a three-pronged approach to socializing children in rural areas, seeking to incorporate and “civilize” through educational reform, literacy campaigns, and “cultural missions,” which had been instituted in the 1920s by Jose Vasconcelos, the first minister of education in the post-Revolutionary period. To combat the literacy problem, the SEP sought to discover ways in

34 Deborah Dorotinsky, “El Maestro Rural and the Photographic Education of Mexicans,” in Rachael Arauz, Adriana Zavala, and James Oles, Lola Álvarez Bravo and the Photography of an Era (Barcelona: Editorial RM, 2013), 144.

35 From 1931 to 1940, the SEP was mostly influenced by Marxist principles in its institutional growth and reform. Moreover, as John A. Britton explains, the aims of the SEP were concerned first with rural education; then with the problems of teacher unionization, industrial and urban education, and the need to unify national and state school systems. See Britton, “The Mexican Ministry of Education, 1931–1940,” 2–3.

36 Literature on José Vasconcelos’s educational plans is vast and comprehensive. For a more in-depth analysis of the educational model and plan by Vasconcelos see for example John A. Britton, Educación y Radicalismo en México (Mexico City: Secretaría de Educación Pública,
which to involve children in schools in the countryside. Additionally, the reformist government of President Cárdenas (1934–40) encouraged a populist approach with regard to social change in Mexico, and instituted what was modeled as a socialist educational curriculum in order to raise literacy.  

In its look and feel, *EMR* consequently assumed a layout similar to Soviet magazines—often including images of physical education, industry, workers, peasants, life in the country, literacy campaigns, agriculture, and aspects of popular culture. This modest magazine was published using inexpensive paper, averaged forty pages in length, and was printed bi-monthly until 1936. While photography was used infrequently during the first few years of its run, and instead leaned more toward stylized drawings of Mexican types, the use of photography was eventually increased in 1934 when Lázaro Cárdenas became president. Ultimately photography and photomontage appeared widely on its covers and interior pages and the magazine published work by Álvarez Bravo, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Agustín Jiménez, and Luis Márquez Romay.

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37 For example, the plays and stories printed in *EMR* followed a strict mission to introduce children to new modern enemies. Puppet troupes funded by the SEP printed plays for children to act out and gave instructions on how to build sets and puppets. In these didactic plays, puppet characters paraded patriotic virtues, across makeshift stages to teach children how to be ideal post-Revolutionary citizens even as they encounter enemies ranging from exploitive bosses to bacteria. For a more detailed account of such stories and plays, see Albarrán, “Children of the Revolution”; Herr, “Puppets and Proselytizing”; and Vaughan, *Cultural Politics in Revolution*.


39 Ibid., 169.

40 See Dorotinsky, “*El Maestro Rural* and the Photographic Education of Mexicans,” 144.
Femininity in *El Maestro Rural*

The lessons, images, and texts for rural children that *EMR* disseminated were slanted in such a way that they reinforced tradition gender roles. Arguably the texts inside the magazine were meant to teach women their rightful place in the post-Revolutionary state.41 As lead photographer of *EMR* in 1935–36, Álvarez Bravo contributed to this narrative via documentary-style images and photomontages that were used for to advance the model male proletarian child as he was defined by the SEP. While Álvarez Bravo’s position gave her the opportunity to capture photographs that she felt were most poignant, she was still required to address certain subjects as mandated by the SEP—those that would fit cohesively within the repertoire of propagandistic icons of the ideal post-Revolutionary child. *EMR* thus served as a tool for the SEP to reinforce traditional gender roles for women who now had a prescribed and essential role in Mexican society to rear the new ideal post-Revolutionary citizens.42 This role is most evident in

41 As Elena Albarrán notes, while rural children of both genders technically received the same education, clubs and organizations that were promoted within the magazine acted as places for boys and girls to learn to express revolutionary nationalism according to their respective gender roles, which were seen as quite different. For example, as she explains, Boy Scouts focused on the construction of “self-controlled masculinity, with an emphasis on strengthening the body, conquering the national terrain, and ultimately becoming the master of one’s physical environment,” while the Big Sister Committee emphasized “domestic service, charity, and compassion toward the less fortunate as expressions of feminine nationalism.” See Albarrán, *Seen and Heard in Mexico*, chapter 6.

42 There are several examples within the magazine to demonstrate this point. Woman’s role as caregiver through new methods of medicine and hygiene were presented in recurring sections such as, “Medicina Social,” *El Maestro Rural* 7, no. 3 (August 1, 1935): 34. Sections like “Postulados de la Mujer Trabajadora,” in the April 15, 1935 issue gave women a series of commandments about how women should behave in order to be productive and ideal members of Mexican society; see *El Maestro Rural* 6, no. 8 (April 15, 1935): 35.
the magazine’s images and texts that served as a campaign for revolutionary citizen-building and targeted women, children, and family exclusively.\textsuperscript{43}

Photographs in the periodical usually depicted rural children, who were integral to the government conception of the ideal post-Revolutionary citizen. They often showed students studying in the classroom, queuing outside for free books, or working on school projects.\textsuperscript{44} These images display two integral objectives in the SEP mission: first, literacy and education were of the utmost importance for male youths from outside the city—they needed to be the generation of change that Mexico in order to bridge the societal gap between the rural, illiterate campesinos and the upper class elite; second, images of young groups in the classroom reveal this locale as a laboratory for growing revolutionary nationalism.\textsuperscript{45} The front cover of the April 15, 1936 issue of \textit{EMR} (Figure 1.3) clearly evinces the objective of showing a laboratory of nationalism. The angle of the camera, at the eye-level of the students, and the tight cropping around them suggest their importance. Children diligently focus on their tasks at the school, seemingly unaware of the


\textsuperscript{44} See for example the photographs in \textit{El Maestro Rural} 6, no. 7 (April 1, 1935), in which children are building a makeshift puppet theater set, or \textit{El Maestro Rural} 8, no. 10 (February 1936), in which children line up outside holding onto their \textit{Simunte} magazine.

photographer’s presence. Their bare feet and muslin overalls suggest that although poor, they will become the future of Mexico through socialist education.

As the texts and images within EMR constantly reiterate, the role of teachers and mothers was to raise a male child who would be recognized by his peers as a productive member of Mexican society or the government. The language describing the glorified male campesino and his female counterpart overtly dismissed women’s societal contribution outside of traditional nurturing and family raising. An example of this language can be seen in a section titled “Postulados de La Mujer Trabajadora” (Postulates of the Woman Worker) from the April 15, 1935, issue. This section defined commandments for post-Revolutionary female involvement in Mexico, decreeing that “the working woman is faithful to the worker and peasant cause, the working woman strives to be useful to the Social Revolution, the working woman combats the vices and enslavement of their classes, and the working woman prepares her children for the transformation of the prevailing economic regimen.”

Thus EMR posited that the working woman’s role and duty was not to support her family monetarily as would be assumed by the words “working woman;” rather her role work was confined to her family circle and she was meant to be confined to child rearing. Long forgotten were the soldaderas (women soldiers), following their men off to war, as they had been during the Mexican Revolution (1910–20); instead females were asked to be educational soldiers in the home.

The physical health and hygiene of women and girls was fundamental to the propaganda of EMR. The magazine’s November 1, 1935, issue shows a young woman who exercises for her

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46 In the original Spanish: “La mujer trabajadora es fiel a la causa obrera y campesina. La mujer trabajadora se afana por ser útil a la Revolución Social. La mujer trabajadora prepara a sus hijos para la transformación del régimen económico imperante.” See El Maestro Rural 6, no. 8 (April 15, 1935): 35.
mental and physical health, as prescribed. She holds two dumbbells and gazes outwardly in the photograph that accompanied an article that detailed the (Figure 1.4). She stretches one arm forward while the other one reaches above her head. The profile of the woman, with slicked back hair and a plain white blouse, robs the reader of any significant physical characteristics to place her—thus this image becomes an icon of ideal femininity, in whom, because of her neutral wardrobe, kept hair, and participation in physical activity, any woman could see herself. The low, somewhat unconventional camera angle displays one of the formal innovations in the journal’s appearance, which started in 1934 and was meant to capture a certain look, activity, or emotion. The tight cropping and the angle in this photograph recall many of Alesander Rodchenko’s photographs for sports events.

The text that accompanies this image reinforces the idea that an ideal woman participates in exercise. It reads:

Undoubtedly, the strengthening of the human race depends largely on the health of the parents of new beings who live in the world. For many years women had been confined to housework, devoid of sun, air, and water. Her physical exercises were reduced to a minimum, and if anything, she was sometimes granted, as recreational activity, dancing; sometimes unnerving and awakening her morbid feelings. Now, sports are cultivated for women, and these exercises make the body strong and trained for the physiological functions, making it easier to fulfill its purpose, apart from that is greater mental development.


49 “Es indudable que el fortalecimiento de la raza humana depende, en gran parte, de la salud de los progenitores de los nuevos seres que vienen al mundo. Durante muchos años se tuvo a la mujer relegada a los quehaceres domésticos, carente del sol, de aire y de agua. Sus ejercicios físicos se redujeron al mínimo, y si acaso, algunas veces se le concedía, como esparcimiento, el baile, que en ocasiones resultaba enervante, por despertar en ella sentimientos morbosos. Ahora, los deportes son cultivados por las mujeres, y esos ejercicios las hacen fuertes y las capacitán para que el funcionamiento fisiológico de su cuerpo haga más fácil el cumplimiento de su misión, aparte de que sea mayor su desarrollo mental.” See El Maestro Rural 7, no. 9 (November 1, 1935): 19.
Here the physical fitness of a woman supports her female “purpose.” Thus, the way women could display their post-Revolutionary nationalism was by being physically fit, hygienic, and productive, all for the good of the future generation.

The statement in the November 1 issue of *EMR* reiterates the two distinct strains of feminism in Mexico: bourgeois feminism and socialist feminism. As Mary Kay Vaughan has described:

Bourgeois feminism stems from the bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie: it is designed to facilitate the greater participation of women in bourgeois society. It implicitly and explicitly legitimizes the subordination of labor to capital. Socialist feminism understands the special oppression of women within the context of an analysis of capitalism and seeks to overcome it through a revolutionary movement led by the working class and aimed at eliminating the subordination of labor to capital.\(^{50}\)

As Vaughn notes, socialist feminism did not necessarily imply a greater participation of women in public society; rather women were expected to reaffirm and strengthen their traditional roles—all for the progression of the ideal male proletarian child.

**Photomontage in *El Maestro Rural***

With the understanding that *EMR* constituted a context in which the image of the child was developed as a new symbol of modernity and nationalism, an investigation of Álvarez Bravo’s photomontages published on its pages yields the depiction of pervasive gender inequality. As mentioned earlier, Álvarez Bravo created two photomontages, *El Sueño de los Pobres* (see Figure 1.1) and *Capital Hambriento de Sobre Trabajo* (see Figure 1.2), which appeared on the same page of the April 15, 1935, issue of the magazine (Figure 1.5) as an advertisement for an

\(^{50}\) Vaughan, “Women, Class, and Education in the Mexican Revolution,” 137.
exhibition organized by María Izquierdo of political posters by her female students. Like the straight photography in *EMR*, these photomontages were used for propagandistic purposes by the SEP; specifically, they reiterated the problems associated capitalism and greed, exemplified by the bourgeoisie, which would exacerbate existing socioeconomic gaps in society. A close reading of these photomontages, however, reveals another purpose: a nuanced criticism of traditional gender roles.

The issue that contained these works was standard in that it included the same types of documentary-style images of children in school, farm animals, and rural schools that were typical during the Cárdenas years of the publication. This issue was dedicated to Emiliano Zapata, the leader of the peasant revolution; its front cover was adorned with a portrait of the legendary revolutionary, and the name of the magazine written in red and black ink, colors that alluded to and exalt the socialist aligned model for the SEP’s policies (Figure 1.6). The texts within reiterate the function and importance of cultural missions for educational reform, which are meant to create “a true proletarian consciousness,” even among the *campesinos* and their children who studied in rural schools. The various texts also deal with topics such as the death

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51 The exhibition, *Carteles revolucionarios de las pintoras del sector femenino de la Sección de Artes Plásticas, Departamento de Bellas Artes* (*Revolutionary Posters from the Painters of the Women’s Group of the Section of Visual Arts, Department of Fine Arts*), was organized by María Izquierdo in Guadalajara in May 1935. Very little is known about this exhibition besides the participants that included: Regina Pardo, Gloria Urrueta, Esperanza Muñoz, Aurora Ramos, Francisca Sánchez, Elena Huerta, Celia Arredondo, and Isabel de Carrio. Debroise notes that the exhibition was originally planned to circulate the show, but there is no information to document that it was shown outside of Guadalajara. See Debroise, *Mexican Suite*, 261.

of Zapata, the agrarian movement in Mexico, rural sport, and instructions on how to cultivate onions and raise pork.  

*El Sueño de los Pobres* is the most recognizable of the two photomontages. The scene contains two different registers. The bottom register shows a sleeping child, wearing muslin overalls, while the top register depicts a machine producing currency. The bottom portion with the sleeping child shows the reality of the plight of the working class. Álvarez Bravo creates tension by juxtaposing the unhappy scene of the disheveled child asleep on the floor, with decaying wood surrounding him, and a minting machine that is about to crush him. The large machine spewing currency out of its wheels violently interrupts the youth’s slumber, as massive coins fall precariously close to his head, seconds away from crushing him. The child—dirty, disheveled, and degraded—is perilously threatened by currency-driven capitalist society. The title, *The Dream of the Poor*, holds two meanings: the obvious idea that the destitute child is dreaming of unobtainable riches; and the dream is actually a nightmare in which the forces of capitalism suffocate the working class.

Although Álvarez Bravo was required to capture images and create photomontages that cohesively fit SEP’s manufactured narrative of the ideal national citizen, there are hints in her photomontages that she may not have agreed with the concept of the ideal citizen that she was hired and expected to represent and promote. *El Sueño de los Pobres* can thus be interpreted as departing from SEP propaganda. Undoubtedly, the lack of education, unequal political representation, and instability of women within the new economic order directly relates to poverty. The child from unfortunate and humble origins is a representative of rural children throughout provincial areas of Mexico—without hope or prospects of a better future because of

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53 See *El Maestro Rural* 6, no. 8 (April 15, 1935) for a full list of articles.
his status as a campesino. If woman is seen as the guardian of familial welfare, here the mother’s lack of representation, suggests a reason for his lack of education, and earning potential.

The disheveled child’s image could also be an indictment of the breakdown of the nuclear family, which would have been a narrative happily accepted by the SEP. This work therefore can be understood as the showing the consequences of women who refuse traditional gender roles, as it would have been seen in EMR. It could also be seen as an expression of Álvarez Bravo’s own feminist views. Álvarez Bravo brings to light the history of traditional gender roles as mothers, household workers, and caregivers through her depiction of the poor urchin. In traditional versions of the mother and child, the child sleeps within his mother’s arms, with a warm and tender feel. Here, lacking a mother figure, the child is left to sleep in a pile of debris. The motherless child can thus be seen as an allegory for poverty. Álvarez Bravo, however, does not place blame on the absence of a mother figure. Instead she includes the oversized minting machine, which can be interpreted as an allegorical representation of masculinity, overtaking the helpless child. The massive force of capitalism, both intrusive and aggressive, can be interpreted as a nuanced criticism of the virile nationalism and gender inequality.

Álvarez Bravo’s second photomontage similarly conveys a poignant social critique and addresses labor and wealth disparities. El Capital Hambriento de Sobre Trabajo shows a prominent vertical figure: a man whose face has been replaced with a skull, who stands nonchalantly with his hand in his pocket of his fine suit jacket, and whose posture and dress suggest that he is a member of the bourgeoisie.\textsuperscript{54} He stands over the working figures while they struggle to push heavy machinery. A striking image of a barefoot female corpse lies atop the

\textsuperscript{54} The image of the male figure with a skull for a face also recalls the Epilogue section of Sergei Eisenstein’s unfinished 1930 film, \textit{Que Viva Mexico!}
engine on the left side of the composition; the figure embodies the toll that the machinery of capitalism takes on its victims.

The dramatic scene is almost cinematic in nature, as the wrinkles of the workers’ jackets and the folds on the corpse’s dress suggest motion. Below them, a series of small male figures lean on or near the train as the three larger campesinos struggle to push the train along. These nonworking men, who stand around watching others work at the bottom right of the composition, may be representative of those who are unwilling to work communally. Thus, if some Mexican people choose not to work alongside the others, eventually the nation will perish, as represented by the lifeless female body that lies on top of the train. The two larger workers in the center of the composition nevertheless press on under capitalism’s orders.

The anti-capitalist message put forth by El Capital Hambriento de Sobre Trabajo is simple enough to understand from a visual standpoint. As in El Sueño de los Pobres, El Capital uses the iconography of industry and produces a composition suggesting that capitalism will be the downfall of Mexico. Again, this type of propagandistic image would have fit cohesively within the leftist imagery that the SEP supported and promoted. As in El Sueño, while Álvarez Bravo created El Capital as a critique of socioeconomic disparity, she also presents a subtle critique of social constructions of gender roles.

Álvarez Bravo brings gender into the discussion by creating a male versus female opposition, positioning standing male figure looming over the lifeless female body. Here the bourgeois male figure, who does not have to get dirty working, yet reaps the benefits, represents not only capitalism but also the archaic patriarchal society that reiterated traditional gender roles. He represents both the past and a warning for the future—if capitalism is allowed to seep into
Mexico, the economic elite will crush the working classes, allowing for greater socioeconomic disparity.

The barefoot female body, which lies on the engine in an almost elegant fashion and whose posture recalls the Pietà, also brings gender to the fore. The traditional image of the Pietà depicts the lifeless body of Jesus, who lies in this fashion, while mother Mary supports him. The reversal of characters is yet another disruption of social gender roles. Here, the fallen woman receives no support; instead she lies alone atop of a train that presses on towards a new objective. This fallen woman represents the body of Mexico: she lies ravaged upon the machinery that has murdered her in capitalism’s greedy conquest to take over the body of Mexico. She is distinguished from the other figures in the composition not only by the horizontal position of her body, but also the difference in her wardrobe—an overall dress with a rolled up cotton shirt beneath it, suggesting the urban, laboring class. Her dress also suggests she is one of the few women beginning to break out of traditional roles, however, the outcome of the figure poses a warning for women wishing to work within the capitalistic system. Here the fallen woman represents the demise of Mexican workers and women should the greed of capitalism seep into the body of Mexico.

Unlike Álvarez Bravo’s other photomontage, El Capital cohesively fits the repertoire of socialist propaganda posters. The inclusions of text inside the photographic composition as well as the exaggerated size of many of the figures evince this commonality. The inscribed words similarly direct the message, leading to the capitalist figure and then the dead woman atop the machine. The text echoes the verticality of the image, with the word “hambriento” (hungry) mirroring the height of the capitalist figure. The words “de sobre trabajo” (from overwork) are purposefully slanted to mimic the female body, which represents every woman, overworked but
still starved to death. Additionally, the juxtaposition between the working classes in the lower register and capitalism above is a more convincing call to action.

Álvarez Bravo used photomontage’s ability to convey a political message in both of the photomontages published in EMR that she could not achieve with standard photography. The formal action of creating photomontage, the cutting and splicing of each individual image, is a violent act that echoes the political messages in a way that still photography cannot. Álvarez Bravo created propagandistic images that not only spoke to socioeconomic inequality, but also displayed a nuanced critique of gender disparity and of the tentative position of women in labor. Her ability to use photomontage to convey a political message, while also displaying a critical response to traditional gender roles follows Gustav Klutsis’s 1931 statement regarding photomontage’s bipartite tendencies.

There are two general tendencies in the development of photomontage: one comes from American publicity and is exploited by the Dadaists and Expressionists—the so-called photomontage of form; the second tendency, that of militant and political photomontage, was created on the soil of the Soviet Union.55

This bipartite form guides the analysis of Álvarez Bravo’s photomontage production throughout this thesis. Both El Sueño de los Pobres and El Capital are examples of “militant and political” photomontages that are in line with the Soviet strain of production, wherein photomontage is used to comment on socioeconomic disparity inside the pages of politically aligned magazines.56


56 Coming out of the history of advertising, Soviet political posters and the Dada group in Germany in the 1920s, photomontage utilized text, drawings, collages of photographs, and advertisements. Despite the Dadaists’ claims to creating the medium, several scholars locate the origins of “photocollage” in nineteenth-century practices, citing advertisements and doubling over of photographs as the direct origin of the medium. For example, André A. E. Disderi’s cartes-de-vistes mosaics made in 1887 as well as advertising and graphic design. See, Rachel
Conclusion

The educational magazine \textit{EMR} functioned as a tool for the SEP to integrate rural children via their schoolteachers and mothers into the new Mexican society. In April 1935 Álvarez Bravo published two photomontages in the magazine for the propagandistic purposes of addressing socioeconomic disparity, as promoted by the SEP. While she provided numerous other photographs and photomontages during her tenure as lead photographer—which were often uncredited and used long after she left the magazine—that coincided with the organization’s mission to show ideal national citizens, she did not necessarily agree with its goals. The deliberate use of the photomontage medium to address socioeconomic disparity, along with the clear attribution by the magazine, allows the viewer to witness Álvarez Bravo’s views by her explicit decision to create unique images that stray from her traditional photographic practice. A close reading of her photomontages demonstrates that their manufactured compositions can also be seen as an expression of her own feminist views, further evidenced by her submission of these two photomontages in the 1935 exhibition of political posters by women artists organized by Izquierdo. Both compositions show that Álvarez Bravo provided images and photomontages for the SEP that simultaneously conveyed propagandistic messages but also shifted blame away from women by subtly critiquing the SEP’s own idealist view of womanhood. The subtle critique of the SEP’s view on women and motherhood seen in Álvarez Bravo’s photomontages became more overt in her later work, especially for those printed and consumed on a larger scale.

Chapter Two

**Photomontage and Murals: Modernity and Gender in the Mid-1940s and Early 1950s**

During the mid-1940s, as employment opportunities in the government began to wane, Álvarez Bravo began to work for private industry. In the interim period, between 1936 and 1941, she had a series of what she called her “chambas,” or odd jobs,\(^{57}\) where she completed many photographic assignments for Laboratoria de Arte at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) and INBA\(^{58}\) in the 1940s. For these photographic commissions she did not use photomontage, and instead focused on photojournalism and documentary style images,\(^{59}\) most likely due to the need to provide detailed images of either factories and machinery or architectural sites.\(^{60}\) During this extended period of odd jobs during the thirties and forties, her many photographic commissions required her to travel throughout Mexico, as evidenced by her 1939 project of documenting drought victims of the La Laguna region of Northern Mexico.\(^{61}\) In these varied commissions, Álvarez Bravo documented the ways of life of rural and cosmopolitan Mexicans alike. Moreover, on these excursions Álvarez Bravo captured diverse subjects ranging from factory scenes to architectural studies, many of which became material for her photomontages.

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\(^{58}\) The government department that hired Álvarez Bravo in 1941 was known as the Dirección de Educación Extraescolar y Estética. It later changed its name to the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura in 1946. See Elizabeth Ferrer, *Lola Alvarez Bravo*, (New York: Aperture, 2006), 154.

\(^{59}\) Ibid.

\(^{60}\) For example, Álvarez Bravo was commissioned in 1936 by the Universidad Nacional de México (UNAM) to take documentary-style photographs of the colonial choir stalls from San Augustín church. See Ferrer, *Lola Alvarez Bravo*, 163.

Álvarez Bravo returned to her photomontage practice again in 1944, this time focusing on the ever-changing landscape of Mexico’s industrial cities in the North. The compositions discussed in this chapter were used for advertising and design purposes, favoring “photomontage of form,” as Gustav Klutsis defined it in his 1931 statement.\footnote{Dawn Ades, \textit{Photomontage} (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976), 15.} Specifically, these compositions, all of which were printed as large-scale murals, echoed the urbanization of Mexico. These photomurals adorned the walls of large office buildings or filled the backdrop of movie sets, becoming a new version of muralism, post-	extit{los tres grandes} (the three great ones, Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros)\footnote{The three artists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco were coined \textit{los tres grandes} for their overwhelming and dominant mural production often sponsored by the government during the immediate post-Revolutionary period. These early mural commissions were conceived to be universal representations of Mexican cultural identity. The literature on these three figures is vast and comprehensive. See for example Alejandro Anreus, Leonard Folgarait, and Robin Adèle Greeley, eds., \textit{Mexican Muralism: A Critical History} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012); Mary Coffey, \textit{How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); and Leonard Folgarait, \textit{Mural Painting and Social Revolution in Mexico, 1920-1940, Art of the New Order} (Cambridge University Press, 1998).} that coincided with the increased presence of technology in Mexico, which became known as the Mexican Miracle—the economic boom brought on, in part, by the reduction of political turmoil, with the creation of a single, dominant party.\footnote{Alan Knight, “The End of the Mexican Revolution? From Cardenas to Avila Camacho, 1937-1941” in \textit{Dictablanda: Politics, Work, and Culture in Mexico, 1938-1968}. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).} As James Oles suggests, by creating large-format photomurals of factories, Álvarez Bravo attempted to elevate the status of photomontage to that of muralism in Mexico. For this reason, Oles regards Álvarez Bravo as the “forgotten muralist.”\footnote{Oles titled his recent 2016 talk, “Mexico’s Forgotten Muralist: Lola Álvarez Bravo and Photomurals in the 1950s.” April 19, 2016, CUNY Graduate Center, New York, New York.}
In their focus on the process of Mexican modernization, these photomontages also brought out the tensions that played out between the modern and the traditional, with an emphasis on the body’s role within these processes. This chapter discusses the three photomontages, *Hilados del Norte I* (*Factories of the North I*, Figure 2.1), *Hilados del Norte II* (*Factories of the North II*, Figure 2.2), and *Anarquía Arquitectónica de la Cuidad de México* (*Architectural Anarchy in Mexico City*, Figure 2.3). Examination of these photomurals reveals that in them Álvarez Bravo critiqued gender in manifold ways, primarily by depicting the gendered body through modernization. This theme is seen in the varying degrees of masculinity that Álvarez Bravo presents and disrupts, in contrast to the hyper-masculine depiction of the worker as disseminated by muralists like Diego Rivera. In addition, these works and Álvarez Bravo’s identity as a female muralist challenged the very medium of muralism as a traditional art form and status of the male muralist in Mexico.  

A comparison of Álvarez Bravo’s photomurals to Rivera’s examples, yields a fruitful discussion on the problems gender within Mexican modernity. Finally, gender also proves relevant to my investigation into the installation and purpose of the photomurals.

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66 Mexican born women artists rarely had mural commissions in the post-Revolutionary period. Even if artists were granted a commission often times their projects never came to fruition, as was the case for María Izquierdo and her 1945 mural project that was taken away. There have been several examples of women from the United States that came to Mexico to paint murals, such as Grace and Marion Greenwood, Ione Robinson, and Ryah Ludins, but their Mexican counterparts were not given the same opportunities. Aurora Reyes was the first example of a Mexican woman that was given a commission to paint a mural in Mexico. Her mural, *Ataque a la Maestra Rural*, 1936 was produced for the Centro Escolar Revolución in Downtown Mexico. For a more information about Reyes and her mural commission see Dina Mirkin, “Aurora Reyes’s Ataque a La Maestra Rural: The First Mural Created by a Mexican Female Artist.” *Woman's Art Journal* vol. 26, no. 2 (2005): 19–25. For more information about U.S. born women artists and their mural projects in Mexico see James Oles, *Walls to Paint On: American Muralists in Mexico, 1933–1936* (Ph.D. dissertation, New Haven: Yale University), 1995; and Oles, “The Mexican Murals of Marion and Grace Greenwood,” *Out of Context: American Artists Abroad*. (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2004), 113–134.
Mexico’s Changing Landscape

The 1940s marked not only significant growth of the Mexican economy, but also a shift in Álvarez Bravo’s photographic practice. As the Mexican landscape began to change with factories populating the industrial capital in the North, Álvarez Bravo began to experiment again with photomontage, this time to create juxtapositions of natural elements with agents of modernization: new skyscrapers dotting Mexico City’s urban landscape, large machines, and workers. This industrialization is most evident in both *Hilados del Norte I* and *Hilados del Norte II*, photomurals installed, respectively, for an unknown textile factory and for the boardroom of AutoMex, the Chrysler factory in Monterrey. In these works Álvarez Bravo unites images of industry with the mountainous landscape for which the northern region of Monterrey is known.

In *Hilados del Norte I* Álvarez Bravo enacts a more strident criticism of gender roles from that in the previous chapter through the depiction of masculinity, the absence of the female body, and the arrangement of bodies in relationship with machines. In *Hilados del Norte I*, a space filled mechanical looms envelopes and dwarfs two male figures. The men occupy the right and left sides of the composition, as the rolls of yarn spin around them. Two disembodied hands grasp onto to control levers, holding a prominent place in the center of the composition. These hands emerge out of the Mexican landscape, pushing technology forward. The overwhelming nature of the composition is echoed by the continuous rows of machinery, placed in close proximity to each other, which create powerful orthogonals that lead the viewer’s eyes to the mountainous terrain of Monterrey in the background.

Here, Álvarez Bravo created a scene where male workers are shown secondary to the environment around them as labor is no longer as active, a reverse of canonical precedents of the exalted factory worker, evidenced in compositions such as in Diego Rivera’s 1932–33 mural series *Detroit Industry* (Figure 2.4), where men work together on the assembly of automobiles.
Rivera’s mural depicts factory workers in active states that include both drilling, pushing, pulling and engaging with the machines around them. Álvarez Bravo’s factory workers on the other hand are not shown in an active state; instead the laborers are shown in a passive, less energetic role than Rivera’s factory workers, as the mechanical objects around them are the producers instead. The repetition of the same image of the loom and the dramatic shift in scale between the small human inclusions and the textile machines impresses upon the viewer the monumentality and humbling power of the factory in relation to the diminished worker who appears but a cog in the machine. Thus the workers become secondary actors to production, overwhelmed by the industrial scene. Álvarez Bravo’s decision to include two male factory workers off to the far sides of the composition make the figures neither central nor crucial to the textile production occurring around them. Instead, these figures are made only to exist in the periphery of the composition, and by extension, the labor.

The conflict in scale between the miniscule male bodies and the industrial machine address the varying degrees of masculinity represented inside the industrial landscape; however, the disembodied large male hands are the most compelling element of the photomontage with regard to the male body in the landscape. Given that textile production had long been a handicraft practiced by females using their bodies, gender is immediately visible through the absence of the female figure within the industrial landscape. The image suggests that industry brings a role reversal with regard to the concept of traditional “women’s work,” and the focal point is shifted from the mechanical looms to the disembodied male form in the landscape. These hands grip lightly onto the two central levers, seemingly stationary, as the rest of the composition is filled with textiles and yarn. Arguably by focusing solely on the factory workers’ hands and not picturing the rest of his body, Álvarez Bravo refuses to depict canonical representations of
the factory worker and instead focuses on industrial progress. She shows these large hands in a non-active state, perhaps to deconstruct and challenge the iconography of the hyper-masculine factory worker that was prevalent in the work of her male contemporaries, notably Rivera.

For example, Álvarez Bravo’s engagement with issues of gender is most evident when compared with the depiction of masculinity in *Hilados del Norte I* to that of Rivera’s mural *El Hombre en la Encrucijada* (Man at the Center of the Universe, Figure 2.5) located at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City. Rivera’s mural centers on a male figure who comfortably resides in and controls the mechanical and natural elements around him. The mural is a testament to technology and science as powerful forces that can lead humankind to a better future. The central image depicts man as the controller of the mechanical universe; Rivera’s man is the agent and machine is his object. Before him, a giant fist emerges holding an orb that depicts, chemical and biological generation. From the middle figure, four propeller-like shapes emerge, each containing a scientific theme. Throughout the composition, Rivera included various aspects of technology advancement, with x-ray machines, microscopes, tanks, and gears. Together these images communicate that man, as the controller of the universe, has melded seamlessly with the machines behind him; he is one with the machine, and controls it. Rivera’s mural represents nature and industry as totally in sync. In contrast, Álvarez Bravo’s photomural portrays the disjunctions between the natural and the technological, given that her male figures play a passive role because of industrialization processes.

Álvarez Bravo treats the masculine in a different manner than Rivera in his mural as well. The latter’s main figure, possessing a strong jaws and huge hands, is a hyper-masculine, idealized toiler with stoic gaze. Álvarez Bravo, however, breaks down this archaic narrative by

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67 This version that is currently installed in the Placio de Bellas Artes in Mexico City is a version of the ill-fated Rockefeller Center mural Rivera planned and started but was eventually destroyed.
relegating the factory laborers to the margins of the composition, as secondary players in the industrial scene. Álvarez Bravo challenges Rivera’s virile representation, and indeed the glorification of the worker in an industrial setting. She instead represents man only in small, unexaggerated factory workers, over whom loom uncontrollable forces of modernization, suggesting the negative consequences of industry for the future.

While Álvarez Bravo’s Hilados del Norte I and Rivera’s Hombre en la Encrucijada both depict man within an industrially and technologically advanced setting, the feminine is referenced differently. In Rivera’s mural, it is obvious that man is most important—per the title and the composition, in which women, especially the modern woman, are pushed to the periphery. This idea is evident in Rivera’s depiction of the group of pelonas, or modern women with short hair akin to the American flapper, who occupy themselves by playing cards just to the left of center. There are other representations of women in Rivera’s composition, such as those who are shown as part of a political demonstration or as onlookers of an event, although they, too, play secondary roles. Álvarez Bravo, on the other hand, chooses not to represent the female form at all in her photomural. By doing so, Álvarez Bravo separates women from textile production, though they were relied upon for it in preindustrial Mexico.

This issue of the body in the industrial landscape is further developed further in Hilados del Norte II (Figure 2.2), a large-scale photomural commissioned for the boardroom of the AutoMex factories in Monterrey. The composition shows the strength of man and the machine in providing industrial services to a modern city. Espacios, a magazine published by the architectural faculty at UNAM, printed a short article in 1954 on this photomural, along with...

installation views of the work (Figure 2.6). As noted in the article, the photomural commissioned for AutoMex captured the theme of her commission with “special precision,” more convincingly than painted murals could and “took into account the elements that are most representative of the industry: the machine, man, and movement (the driving force).” Thus, according to the author, the mural met the needs for the commission for the AutoMex boardroom by including a cohesive and compelling image of the marriage between man and machine.

Álvarez Bravo’s *Hilados del Norte II* should be understood as a direct response to the assumption that men were the natural wielders of technology. She addresses and disassembles the idea of the hyper-masculine factory worker as presented by her contemporaries, such as Rivera’s *Detroit Industry* (see Figure 2.4). Instead, Álvarez Bravo sets up her composition, which depicts the building of automobiles, and focuses our attention on a mechanical merman, the figure at right who emerges out of machine parts to the far right of the composition. She reinterprets and challenges the masculine representations of the factory worker by this romantic creature who not hyper-masculine, but rather shown within a feminine, even eroticized, framework. The merman’s bare chest is counteracted by his fin made of machine parts, removing the locus of sexual identity in the male body and replacing it with something seen as typically feminine. Álvarez Bravo thus transforms this male figure, creating him in the mold of a seemingly feminine mythical creature.

While Álvarez Bravo fits her male figures cohesively into the ideal that the strength of man and the machine provide service to the modern city, demonstrated by the factory workers at

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69 Ibid.

70 “Se tomaran en cuenta los elementos más representativos de esa industria: la máquina, el hombre y el movimiento (la fuerza motriz). La composición representa la fuerza del hombre y de la máquina prestando su servicio, a través de la industria una ciudad moderna.” Ibid.
left, she also breaks down the exclusivity of this virile image. In the technological merman, Álvarez Bravo not only strips the figure of his hyper-masculine façade, but also implies that men are not the only possessors of technology. She presents a scene where several male factory workers all work on the assembly line to produce vehicles. Each of the figures are depicted operating machinery, welding, or drilling. Through the elaborate shift in scale and overt eroticization of the merman, attention is focused to the shirtless merman that moves toward the center of the composition. Arguably the eroticization of the merman shows that Álvarez Bravo challenged and reversed suggestive depictions of the female body.

Álvarez Bravo highlights her mechanically clad figure so that he becomes the focal point of the composition. His left forearm casts dark shadows over his face, hiding his identity, while the artificial light highlights his arm, which holds a steel rod. Just above him, a small sliver of sky breaks through the same warm gray that washes over the rest of the composition. The fantastical merman is not simply placed within the manufactured universe that surrounds him, but part of his body is literally embedded within it. The merman wields a wrench-like object in his hand like a torch, as he makes his way toward the center of the composition. By creating a merman in this industrial scene, Álvarez Bravo reinterprets prevailing iconography of the heroic male factory worker.

*Hilados del Norte II* displays the same agents of modernism that appear in the first photomontage, the mechanization of looms and assembly line of automobiles, but the male body now occupies a more active and simultaneously fantastic role. The long stretch of automobiles points to two distinct renderings of Mexico—street scenes versus factory scenes. Off to the left an urban metropolis emerges, with tree-lined streets and buildings in the distance that tower above older buildings. Off to the right we see Mexico in flux—buildings, skyscrapers, and
avenues lined with greenery are currently being built, but we are unsure of the outcome of the scene. The three assembly-line workers in the bottom register blend into the machinery. Just to the right of center, two factory welders work toward building the future of Mexico. The right side of the composition features several overlapped forms and sharp angles make it difficult for viewers to decipher what is presented to them; evidenced by two modernist-type buildings seem to suddenly spring nearly outside the frame of the composition and move toward the sky.

Álvarez Bravo highlights the unidentified merman not only to emphasize the varying degrees of masculinity, but also to depict a lack of agency. The lack of agency is seen most evidently in relation to Rivera’s mural, in which he suggests that only men have a natural affinity to work closely with technology. In Hilados del Norte II, in contrast, the five factory workers seem to blend into their technological background, and their minor roles do not necessarily contribute to the scene as a whole. Their male identities are neither exaggerated nor accentuated. Like in Hilados del Norte I, the minor inclusion of the factory workers in the scene as secondary role players alludes to the male lack of agency.

The mural takes on an additional reading when it is placed inside the boardroom of the AutoMex offices, as the bodies inside of the male-dominated boardroom activated the mural. Arguably, the boardroom would have been filled with male executives who undoubtedly ascribed to the notion that men’s strength was extended by machines. By printing her photomontage to mural scale and installing it inside of a room meant for high-level business, Álvarez Bravo not only asserts herself as a challenger to the male muralist, but also her

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71 The AutoMex of Chrysler company commissioned many artists, including David Alfaro Siqueiros, Rufino Tamayo, and others, to decorate the exterior and interior of its building. For an in-depth description of the architectural plans, the list of artists commissioned to decorate the interior and exterior walls of the site, and images of the various rooms see Espacios: Revista Integral de Arquitectura, Planificacion y Artes Plasticas, Vol. 18 (1954).
photomontage becomes activated and seen by an audience that she would have not been able to reach through the pages of a magazine. Álvarez Bravo’s methodology in employing photomontage is different from that of El Sueño de Los Pobres (see Figure 1.1) and El Capital Hambriento de Sobre Trabajo (see Figure 1.2) as her target audience was no longer the mothers and children of rural Mexico; instead, the monumentality of the photomontage, which moved beyond of the pages of the magazine forced viewers to engage with and become actors in the composition.

The City of the Future

In 1953 Álvarez Bravo made Anarquía Arquitectónica de la Cuidad de México (see Figure 2.3), a photomontage that displays an imagined cityscape. The work was published in the architectural magazine Arquitectura / México in 1955 and was then eventually printed as a large-scale mural that same year, when it was used as a backdrop for the 1955 film La Rival (Figure 2.7) directed by Chano Ureta, which will be discussed below. Through varied surfaces and crossing angles the photomontage presents a futuristic, imagined Mexico City. In the crowded pictorial space of Anarquía, high-rise buildings visibly tower over any signs of humanity. The upward camera angles, which create an allusion of the buildings rising above the sparse signs of humanity below, echo the monumentality of the composition. The image is split into two sections, with an early version of the Torre Latinoamerica (1946–56)—executed Álvarez Bravo using her own negatives of the Torre that was already completed at the time, then repeating the same image at a smaller scale until the structure was complete—as its guiding axis, which is somewhat off kilter

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at right, which adds to disorienting sense of the image. Buildings emerge from the stony foundation in the foreground and spring up like an overgrown concrete garden. At right, *Anarquía* features photographs of the Centro Urbano Presidente Alemán designed by Mario Pani in 1947–49 and an apartment building designed by Augusto Álvarez and Juan Sordo Maldeno in 1947. Beneath these two recognizable buildings is the equestrian statue of Simon Bolívar that had previously occupied the space in front of the apartment building. The hulking forms of the newly emerging city diminish the small scale of the cars and the people.

At first glance the bodies within the industrial landscape presented in *Anarquía* is not an obvious concern; Álvarez Bravo uses photomontage techniques to address issues of modernization and tradition through the buildings themselves. *Anarquía* highlights the push and pull of tradition and modernization through the architecture of the city in flux. Off to the left side of the composition, Álvarez Bravo juxtaposes modern and neoclassical architecture, highlighted through dramatic shifts in scale. This juxtaposition between modern and neoclassical architecture is evidenced by the inclusion of the miniature statue of Bolívar that is placed just off to the right of the monumental structure of Torre Latinoamerica. Álvarez Bravo also includes an image of the Banco de México off to the bottom left, perhaps to bring to the fore the tension between its traditional forms and the modernization of the city skyline. The Banco de México building seems miniscule beneath the considerable size of the modern Torre Latinoamerica and others, perhaps elucidating the shift from the traditional toward a more modern society.

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73 As Jácome has noted, when *Anarquía Arquitectónica de la Cuidad de México* was completed in 1953, Torre Latonoamerica was still under construction. See Jácome, “Model Kit Architecture,” 141.

Álvarez Bravo’s *Anarquía* depicts an over populated, imagined cityscape that anticipates the influx of a larger population, evidenced by large skyscrapers that allude to more living spaces and a city of commerce. The imagery of a city in flux and prediction of industrial changes and modernization’s arrival in Mexico City and surrounding provincial areas had been used by artists since the late 1920s.  

This optimism of a modern city can be seen in Fernando Leal’s frontispiece for the English language version of Maples Arce’s *Metropolis* (Figure 2.8). Here Leal crams into and overlaps his skyscrapers in the picture plane, overcrowding the rising buildings with radio towers, smokestacks, power lines, and trollies. The sharp and converging horizontal and vertical lines coincide with Leal’s version of the city as a mechanical being. The two-toned composition is also compelling as the blue tones of the buildings populating the background seemingly replace the blueness of the sky, and the smokestack atop the central skyscraper replaces the clouds. Leal includes small hints of humans, as seen in the collection of small lines and dashes that make up a mass demonstration below. The unsettling height of the buildings completely overshadows the protestors, as the viewer’s eye is guided upward by the concrete giants.

Álvarez Bravo’s *Anarquía* displays many of the same conventions employed in Leal’s frontispiece, including the limited scale of humans within the growing landscape; however, Álvarez Bravo’s cityscape anticipates the arrival of new bodies into the city. The looming buildings that rise above the small dots of humanity are seen in both compositions and have similar aims at portraying humanity living within a technological world. In Leal’s image,

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however, the city functions as a setting for mass demonstrations and unified people, while the urban setting in Álvarez Bravo’s composition functions more as a place anticipating change and ready to accept a larger population. The jutting and converging lines in Leal’s composition become a familiar characteristic within Álvarez Bravo’s.

While the gendered body within Anarquía does not necessarily become evident through the iconography of the photomontage itself, it was later presented and activated by the actors in the 1955 film La Rival (see Figure 2.7), directed by Chano Ureta. Anarquía’s placement as a backdrop in the film functions in a way similar to Hilados del Norte II within the male dominated boardroom; the wide public exposure solidified not only the medium in its wider position in modern visual culture, but also Álvarez Bravo’s position as female muralist. The bodies of the actors both activate, and define gender in the expanding city. Briefly, the film tells the story of an architect played by Miguel Torruco who is having an affair.77 The mural functions as a backdrop within the office of the main character and features two instances in which two women, presumably his secretary, who he is having an affair with, and his wife gather. Arguably, the tension and conflict between genders can be seen in the figure of the male architect, who reaffirms machismo, with his expansive sexual appetite and belief that it is his right to satisfy it with multiple women and outside the bounds of his marriage. The women are thus shown as victims of machismo, set against Álvarez Bravo’s imagined, ever-expanding landscape, which functioned as a place of commerce, a seemingly male space that was presumably filled with men like Torruco’s character.

The dissemination of this photomontage in architectural magazines and a film alike allowed Álvarez Bravo’s work to be consumed by a broad audience, in a similar manner to

77 Ibid., 142.
Leal’s image for *Metropolis*. When *Anarquía* appeared in on the cover of *Arquitectura/ México* magazine in 1955, which circulated among architectural circles, the image took on a similar role as Leal’s as avant-garde image of an imagined city. Arguably both works function as part of global modernist movements. As for Leal, whose image was made for a U.S. audience and was disseminated outside of Mexico, for Álvarez Bravo, the wide distribution of this photomontage in architectural magazines and film allowed her vision to find a broader audience.

**Conclusion**

Álvarez Bravo created three photomurals in the mid-1940s after a hiatus of six years. The photomurals discussed in this chapter are thematically focused on the ever-changing landscape of Mexico’s industrial cities in the North and the continually changing metropolis of Mexico City. By breaking down the role of the body in the industrial landscape and its varying degrees of masculinity, Álvarez Bravo rejects the notion that men had an innate affinity for technology or that technology equaled masculinity—ideas promulgated by her contemporaries such as Rivera. Instead, Álvarez Bravo deconstructs and reinterprets these precedents to question gendered constructions. By using photomontage techniques such as dramatic shifts in scale, she suggests inconsequential inclusions of masculinity. Álvarez Bravo thus forces viewers to focus instead on reinterpreted depictions of masculinity. In the following chapter, this exploration continues with Álvarez Bravo’s reinterpretation of cultural precedents through her photomontages produced in her Mexico City studio.

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Chapter Three

Photomontage in the Studio: Feminist Critiques of the 1940s

The final stage of photomontage production addressed in this thesis is the body of work Álvarez Bravo made in her studio in Mexico City during the 1940s. Arguably, she addressed women and gender in Mexico more specifically and openly in these works than in her previous efforts in the medium. The photomontages, Universidad Femenina, 1943 (Women’s University, Figure 3.1), Sirenas del Aire, c. 1940s, printed 1958 (Mermaids of the Air, Figure 3.2), and El Sueño del Ahogado, 1945 (Dream of the Drowned, Figure 3.3), were executed at her studio during the 1940s.79 These examples should be seen as representative of Álvarez Bravo’s experimentation with the medium for personal reasons. She made these compositions during the 1940s and they were not exhibited or published as a group until the end of her life, in her 1989 retrospective Lola Álvarez Bravo: Reencuentros.80 It is important to note that Sirenas del Aire also circulated in 1958 as an ad for Olivetti typewriters.81 This grouping of photomontages, however, were neither created explicitly for magazines nor published until significantly later than their creation date. In them Álvarez Bravo treated gender in a different manner than she did in works for public consumption (as in the those discussed in the previous two chapters).

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80 All three were published in the catalogue, Olivier Debroise Lola Álvarez Bravo, Reencuentros: 150 Años de a Fotografía México (Mexico City: Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, Museo Estudio Diego Rivera, 1989), 38, and shown in the exhibition 150 Años de la Fotografía at the Museo Estudio Diego Rivera that same year.

81 Because Sirenas del Aire was not published for at least a decade after its creation, it falls under my categorization as studio work.
As a result of late circulation, this final grouping of photomontages is the least studied by scholars. Before Oliver Debroise discovered these photomontages—after speaking with and digging through Álvarez Bravo’s personal archive⁸²—two of the photomontages were never catalogued. It is unknown as to why she created these photomontages and since this final grouping were not created for a commission. I argue that Álvarez Bravo conceived of these final examples as exercises to critique expectations of women, not only on behalf of the working woman but also for the working woman artist, a reality that she experienced first-hand. Álvarez Bravo and other women artists like María Izquierdo discussed the inequality in opportunities for women,⁸³ compared to those for men, to excel in the arts, and the often-precarious place in society that women occupied on the whole. As Linda Nochlin suggests, if an artist happens to be a woman, then “1,000 years of guilt, self-doubt, and objecthood have been added to the undeniable difficulties of being an artist in the modern world.”⁸⁴ It is important to note that while these women were acutely aware of the oppressive and discouraging nature of being a woman artist, they also understood the best way to comment and combat machismo was through their work.

⁸² See Oliver Debroise, *Lola Álvarez Bravo: In Her Own Light* (Tucson: Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona, 1994).

⁸³ María Izquierdo describes her vantage point of being a woman artist in Mexico City in a July 1939 broadcast, during which she acknowledged that women had experienced, until now, little opportunity to excel in areas previously reserved for male artists. Izquierdo stated that there were “no female Michelangelos,” not because of lack of talent, but because of lack of opportunity, education, and general position in society. See Adriana Zavala, *Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition: Women, Gender, and Representation in Mexican Art* (University Park,: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 237.

The conditions that Álvarez Bravo faced as a single woman and woman artist informed her three photomontages, which can be understood as tools to comment on machismo. In a manner similarly used in the previously discussed photomontages, Álvarez Bravo addresses gender first through form and iconography, then by recasting types. What distinguishes this group of photomontages from the others treated in this text, however, is the method of producing the photomontage itself. Gustav’s statement on the formal and political binaries of photomontage—has guided my analysis of Álvarez Bravo’s photomontages throughout the last two chapters. This third and final grouping fits into neither of the categories described in his statement; instead, in them, Álvarez Bravo treated photomontage as fine art, in which her manipulation of the photographs is evident.

**Women’s Roles in 1940s Mexico**

The intense industrialization of the 1940s reinforced a culture of consumerism, while simultaneously favoring the emergence of a new middle class, one that encouraged women to leave the home and join the workforce. Women had a pivotal role in defining “modern Mexico,” but fit uneasily into reigning discourses of modernity, nationalism, and popular culture. Despite the support of their gender in leaving the home, women were still subjugated to popular expectation of motherhood, a tension present in Álvarez Bravo’s life when she created these

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86 Official organizations like the Frente Único por Derechos de la Mujer (Sole Front for the Rights of Women) were created in the mid-1930s in order to more openly establish the rights of women; even with organizations dedicated to women’s rights, however, the opportunities for women’s intellectual and professional development were still limited. See Teresa Arcq, “In the Land of Compulsive Beauty,” in Fort, Arcq, and Ades, *In Wonderland*, 72.

87 This subjugation faced by women can be seen in newspapers or magazines such as Excelsior or Nosotros, which catered to women as a new ever-expanding group and became mechanisms to
photomontages. Álvarez Bravo was the quintessential version of a modern Mexican woman—a single mother who fulfilled her role as a caretaker while she simultaneously worked and provided for herself and her son. She, like other women in modern Mexico, toed the line between tradition and modernity. Her personal experiences as a modern woman arguably became intertwined with her studio work and can be seen as personal expressions of this pressure and a critique of societal rigidity. Each of the photomontages discussed in this chapter offers a unique response to these tensions between modernity and tradition through the lens of gender.

The iconography of Álvarez Bravo’s 1943 photomontage Universidad Femenina (Figure 3.1) challenges reigning discourses on the modern woman by highlighting the push and pull between modernization and tradition through depicting women learning new trades that would aid them in becoming new members of an emerging middle class. At a base level, the artist displays a series of women attending a fictional university known as the “women’s university.” Ultimately though, Universidad Femenina is a visual representation of the changing role of women, who now train for jobs as teachers, scholars, writers, scientists, and artists. Álvarez Bravo arranged the figures to feature the woman scholar, who is larger and towers over all of the other figures at the center of the composition and arguably embodies all women who leave the home. The central figure highlights the tension associated with the shift away from the home and the quotidian duties associated with being a homemaker.88

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88 Sandra Aguilar-Rodríguez notes in her essay that women had a new role in 1940s Mexico as many were leaving the home and joining the workforce. This shift in women’s daily activities changed several aspects of traditional gender roles, including cooking. See Aguilar-Rodríguez, “Cooking Modernity: Nutrition Policies, Class, and Gender in 1940s and 1950s Mexico,” Americas 64, no. 2 (October 2007), 178.

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reinforce the image of women as mothers. This is shown in the May 10, 1955 Excelsior article which rewards Paula García de Medina with $1,000, a certificate, a medal, and a gas stove for bearing twenty children. See Excelsior: El Periódico de la Vida Nacional, May 10, 1955, unpag.
Although women now occupied a space of change, this shift from homemaking to the menial jobs women were allowed to occupy, was marginal at best, as, according to the widespread view of gender roles, women were still expected to uphold the traditional nuclear family. Álvarez Bravo’s composition brings to mind the unequal opportunities faced by women in many fields deemed only for men, such as in scientific fields. Álvarez Bravo acknowledges this inequity and consequently creates a fictional place that women can study whatever they choose, even science, evidenced by the bottom left register where one woman looks through a microscope and another takes down notes. Overall, the composition notes the importance of education for the ultimate shift in women’s position in society.

In comparison to earlier examples of Álvarez Bravo’s photomontage production, the manner in which she employs the medium has transformed in order to create more overt messages. In its execution, Universidad Femenina is similar to photomontages discussed earlier—Álvarez Bravo hides the rough edges of her images by pasting them to a poster board and then re-photographing the new composition. In contrast to the photomontages she made for EMR, Universidad Femenina shows Álvarez Bravo is no longer concerned with creating her photomontages for a propagandistic magazine or appearing to cohesively fit into its prescribed narrative. She instead turns to creating fine art photomontages that feature tight and refined details, evident in the small, compact elements in the center left of the composition, such as the news clippings from the popular newspaper El Nacional, which would have been difficult to see on a small scale such as the pages of a magazine. Instead, by pasting images that used several innovative camera angles—as in the central figure, whose monumentality is supported not only by the size of the figure but also the manufactured vantage point, an angle created by the

89 Ibid., 179.
technique of positioning the photograph in the composition to make it seem as if the image was taken from below—Álvarez Bravo departs from standard documentary-style images to create a fine art photomontage. This photomontage was arguably conceived to, openly and critically, address gender without following a required narrative of commissioned works.

Álvarez Bravo addresses gender in her photomontage by including figures represented a changing Mexico. For example, the women she depicts specifically challenge cultural stereotypes of the schoolgirl (colegiala). These longstanding archetypes appear in caricatures by José Clemente Orozco and in José Juan Tablada’s criticism of these drawings in popular newspapers like *El Mundo Ilustrado* (Figure 3.4). Álvarez Bravo would have been familiar with Orozco and claim that his favorite artistic subjects were women, specifically colegialas and mujeres de la vida (prostitutes). As Adriana Zavala argues, the colegiala was euphemism for a sexually appealing young woman, who in the streets appeared to be “good” and allowed to be alone under the pretext that she was on her way to “school.” But actually the colegiala had the sexual prowess to become a prostitute. Tablada’s analysis of Orozco’s portfolio of prostitutes and schoolgirls, highlight that in Mexico during the early decades of the twentieth century, men

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90 In a November 1913 illustrated essay in *El Mundo Ilustrado*, Tablada notes his delight of Orozco’s portfolio of women and labels him “the painter of women.” He praised Orozco for comparing images of the colegiala who he described as having “alluring dress and gesture, . . . whose bodies’ definitive form, svelte and curvaceous, begins to reveal itself . . . [and] begin to assert the authority of her sex. . . Her coy glances and affected manners hint at budding naughtiness” similar to that of the prostitute. In the orginal Spanish: “La colegiala saludable, que como un capulla a borde de estallara, aserta ya la autoridad de su sexo a través de la coquetería y la gracia de gesto del vestido.” See José Juan Tablada, “Un Pintor de la Mujer: José Clemente Orozco,” *El Mundo Ilustrado*, November 13, 1913, unpag.; reprinted in Teresa del Conde, ed., *José Clemente Orozco: Antología Crítica* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1983), 32.


92 Ibid.
did not always take women scholars seriously and often assumed that these young, unescorted women occupying public space were on their way to low-paying jobs or to the brothel.

Álvarez Bravo challenges and reinterprets this patriarchal and sexualized schoolgirl stereotype in *Universidad Femenina. Orozco’s colegiala*, (Figure 3.5), which was published in *El Malora* in July 1914, is from the same portfolio that Tablada wrote about. Adorned with an oversized bow, she shyly hugs her book to her body while her *rebozo* (shawl) exposes and exaggerates her hips. Her almond eyes glance to her left as a coquettish smile creeps across her face. Both drawings (Figures 3.4 and 3.5) eroticize schoolgirls, who were then characterized by Tablada as “white, immaculate, flowers with virgin sap just opening their blossoms.” Álvarez Bravo, on the other hand, depicts women scholars in as both serious and diligent. The central figure in Álvarez Bravo’s composition also clutches onto her book without the sly and flirtatious smile; instead, the heroine gazes outwardly, suggesting lively mind that is perhaps deciding whether to become a writer, scientist, artist, teacher, or journalist. The inclusion of the artist, depicted underneath the main figure in the center of the composition with a brush in her hand, suggests that she understands that her role as a female artist is to further advance women in her own field, as well as to support the social progress of women in general. The use of the figure of the teacher at right of the artist, shown writing on the chalkboard, suggests that education will no longer be gendered, as discussed in the first chapter, but will be inclusive and unbiased. Finally, the inclusion of the scientist further reiterates that men do not necessarily have a natural affinity with technology, an idea present in both *Hilados del Norte I* and *II.*

A history of representations of the female scholar shows that there was a distinct slippage that took place between the roles of the woman scholar and the prostitute because both dared to venture into public spaces. Reading into previous depictions of the female student by male artists such as Orozco, Zavala explains the use of the terms colegialas and pupilas to describe young, unescorted women and the ways in which these terms were used interchangeably: the first denotes a schoolgirl, while the latter refers to a young prostitute. Furthermore, Zavala suggests, “young unescorted working-class women were seemingly ‘up for grabs,’ literally and symbolically.”

Griselda Pollock indicates that this attitude applied toward women who ventured outside the home in general, and had currency beyond Mexico in her essay “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity:”

It has been argued that to maintain one’s respectability, closely identified with femininity, meant not exposing oneself in public. The public space was officially the realm of and for men; for women to enter it entailed unforeseen risks. . . . For women, the public spaces thus construed were where one risked losing one’s virtue, dirtying oneself; going out in public and the idea of disgrace were closely allied.

Pollock’s statement on the perception of women is also relevant when discussing Orozco’s caricatures of the schoolgirls out in public. By sexualizing the schoolgirl Orozco shows his discomfort of the idea of a woman leaving behind her home and thus the traditional roles of domesticity and motherhood. In Universidad Femenina Álvarez Bravo, in turn, enacts a critique of such representations that associated young, unescorted students with sexual availability. Álvarez Bravo negates the old version of the sexualized schoolgirl and female body and instead asserts a new narrative of the educated woman. Without bows, coy attitudes, or flirtatious smiles, women become the heroines of her manufactured composition and of Mexican society by

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94 Zavala, Becoming Modern, Becoming Tradition, 110.

focusing on their work with a serious attitude and actively pursuing the education that would enable them to enter public life.

Álvarez Bravo also addresses motherhood and the position of women in society, themes she had referenced less overtly in earlier examples of photomontage. There is an undeniable link between *El Sueño de los Pobres* from 1935 (see Figure 1.1) and *Universidad Femenina*. As argued in the first chapter, *El Sueño de los Pobres* cannot only be interpreted as showing the breakdown of the nuclear family seen by the absent mother figure, but can also be viewed as displaying the inequality of women’s education, political representation, and economic stability. *Universidad Femenina* presents a solution to the plight of the disheveled child featured in the earlier photomontage; through educational opportunities and public representation, demonstrated by each of the female scholars, economic stability will surely follow.

**Women, Surrealism, and Gender**

Surrealism helped shape the artistic trends in Mexico during the late 1930s and 1940s, and avant-garde women artists, like Álvarez Bravo, Izquierdo, and Frida Kahlo addressed public, social issues through representations that focused on the private and internal, using the tools and strategies that Surrealism offered. With these new approaches, artists were able to insert these issues of gender and difference into the narrative of Mexican Art. Whitney Chadwick notes that “Surrealism offered many women their first glimpse of a world in which creative activity and

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97 In discussing Surrealism in Mexico it is imperative to understand that it is vastly different from the original European movement. According to Oles, Surrealism in Mexico was marked by uncanny juxtapositions and references to dreams and the subconscious, but not directly connected to Breton’s specific aesthetic and political platform. Moreover, the adoption of Surrealism by woman artists in Mexico also showed differentiation from the European movement. See ibid., 295.
liberation from family-imposed social expectations might coexist, one in which rebellion was viewed as a virtue, and imagination as the passport to a more liberal life.”

Pioneered by André Breton with his Surrealist manifesto in 1924, Surrealism emphasized dreams, automatic writing, and the primacy of the unconscious. The embrace of Surrealism by Mexican, especially women, artists during the late 1930s into the 1940s cannot be overlooked; this international movement gave Álvarez Bravo the opportunity to fully express the issues of gender she had witnessed throughout her life and career. While the Surrealists came to Mexico in the late 1930s with Breton’s arrival in 1938, the lasting impact of the movement can be seen by artists such as Álvarez Bravo and Izquierdo in their work well into the 1940s.

Álvarez Bravo’s final two photomontages, *Sirenas del Aire* and *El Sueño del Ahogado*, exhibit her use of Surrealist iconography with the medium to juxtapose dissimilar elements in order to address gender. This juxtaposition is done by removing actors and players from their traditional roles and settings, in order to craft new narratives and identities, and then refabricating their image in a new setting in order to function in a new way. Both photomontages, made from her own negatives and not found images like other artists working in...


99 Ibid.


photomontage, include fantastic elements that show Álvarez Bravo questioning, challenging, and at times poking fun at the role of women within Mexican society. These whimsical photomontages demonstrate Álvarez Bravo’s most complex engagement with questions of gender in the medium and her work overall.

Álvarez Bravo places figures outside of their rigid, fixed environment in *Sirenas del Aire* in order to view and challenge gender roles. The photomontage features two mermaids, floating inside of a background devoid of any land markers, who reach toward a large typewriter. Seemingly freed from their confinement in the sea, the mermaids’ graceful arms stretch towards the machine; the mermaid at the bottom reaches up toward the typewriter and the second mermaid reaches, down, as if fighting to drag it out of the pictorial space. The swaying shapes of the mermaid’s bodies within the vacuous space suggest that these sirens can to move freely through their new environment, free to disseminate messages as they please.

In a typically Surrealist manner, Álvarez Bravo groups seemingly dissimilar elements, such as the two mermaids and a typewriter, and in so doing recasts types. The simplicity of the photomontage allows the viewer to focus solely on the actors within the scene and to ponder the multiple roles they can assume. In a similar way to Max Ernst’s Surrealist photomontages, such as *Here Everything Is Still Floating* (Figure 3.6)—with its seemingly illogical juxtapositions of insects, fish, and anatomical drawings, arranged to suggest a myriad of functions that each of the elements can play. The sirens, who in traditional contexts function as enchantresses of the sea, are not equipped with musical instruments to lure nearby sailors with their enchanting music and voices. Instead, stripped of the traditional tools to sing, seduce, and enchant weary sailors, they choose a modern approach to disseminate their messages—the typewriter. By juxtaposing the image of the mermaid, classically characterized as a sexual, conniving being with a modern
machine for communication, Álvarez Bravo comments on gender disparity Mexico. The mermaids may represent liberated woman, with no traditional and culturally imposed posts as mother, wife, and caregiver. And they instead create new roles for themselves, moving beyond sexualization by innovation, through one of the hallmarks of modernity.

*Sirenas del Aire* both questions and challenges gender roles, as is indicative of Álvarez Bravo’s compositions made in the studio, but also then takes on an alternate reading once it is published and disseminated. While it can be argued that this photomontage was completed in her studio during the early 1940s, the composition was not known outside the studio until it was used as an advertisement for Olivetti in 1958. The time in which the advertisement was published changes the context of the photomontage to encompass a new, bolder reading of gender. By using the photomontage for Olivetti, Álvarez Bravo’s could be alluding to and playfully poking at the new role of women as secretaries, a menial job meant only for women.

*Sirenas del Aire* has undeniable connections with *Hilados del Norte II* (see Figure 2.2), which contains the merman figure. As argued in the previous chapter, there Álvarez Bravo created a male figure out of a seemingly feminine representation of a mermaid. By creating a technological merman, she not only strips the figure of any hyper-masculine façade, despite his honed physique, but implies a feminine presence that suggests that men are not the only wielders of technology. In *Sirenas del Aire*, Álvarez Bravo is completely unconcerned with showing

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102 The publishing of the photomontage and this categorization of the compositions as studio work should be understood. *Sirenas del Aire*, unlike the other two photomontages in this chapter, was published in 1958 as an advertisement for Olivetti typewriters, as is evident by the small text on the composition. The images used however, can be dated to the 1940s, evidenced by the model of the typewriter, a Lexikon 80, which was designed in 1942. Arguably this composition could have been created in the 1940s and was only published in 1958 when used for an advertisement. The exact date of the negatives used for the mermaids is unknown. See the Lola Álvarez Bravo Archive, 1901–1994, AG 154, at the Center for Creative Photography in Tucson, Arizona.
representations of masculinity. Instead her mythical female figures interact with the typewriter, an agent of modernism and a representation of technology. The absence of men in the empty landscape similarly posits that they are not the only ones able to activate technology. Moreover, the odd juxtaposition of the modern typewriter with the classical mermaid archetype thus alludes to the clash and renegotiation between modernity and tradition, as is also seen in Hilados del Norte II, where two distinct versions of Mexico are displayed.

_El Sueño del Ahogado_, both critical of gender roles and whimsical in its execution, presents another example of Álvarez Bravo’s practice of recasting feminine types and women’s roles in the later small-scale photomontages she made. Arguably this photomontage recasts Mexican folkloric representations of gender through the image of the ballerina. The photomontage features a Surrealist, dreamlike landscape that Álvarez Bravo created with a mix of elements photographed during her many trips to Veracruz. The landscape is comprised of a sandy beach that leads to still water, and rocklike structures, which are arranged in a wavelike up and down motion. The landscape provides a setting for a group of some twelve ballerinas, but she also includes the floating head of fellow artist Juan Soriano, which will be addressed below. Ballerinas, arranged in groups, dance and pose on stacks of wood, rigid mountainous forms, or on top of branches that rest on the water. The dancers are not dressed in traditional folkloric costumes, such as those worn by the _China Poblana_103 or for the _Jarabe Tapatío_, both of which

103 The fashion design of the _china poblana_ is attributed to Catarina de San Juan, who was a slave from India according to legend. The dress of the _china poblana_ incorporates elements from the diverse cultures that were mixed in New Spain during three centuries of Spanish rule. For more information about the dress of the _china poblana_, see William H. Beezley, _Mexican National Identity: Memory, Innuendo, and Popular Culture_ (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2008).
were used to embody *mexicanidad* (Mexicanness) and as tools to unite the social classes.  

Instead Álvarez Bravo shows them wearing simple, white dresses complete with a satin-like bodices and tulle skirts. The rejection of the traditional folkloric dancer in favor of the modern ballerina shows Álvarez Bravo hinting at recasting types in a nuanced manner, by rejecting the use of the female form to embody *mexicanidad* seen in traditional folkloric dances. Instead, Álvarez Bravo imposes no identity or expectations on her figures.

Álvarez Bravo also displays the continual struggle by women and women artists through the representation of the ballerinas; as in *Sirenas del Aire*, she presents the actors as capable of playing a dual role in their manufactured realities. In the background of the imagined landscape, the ballerinas are carefully balanced atop a series of mountainous rock and wooden structures. In the foreground, four ballerinas begin their journey on the log in the water and climb the first mountain off to the left. The dancers’ up-and-down, wavelike motion echoes the struggle of women in Mexico constantly climbing and navigating societal structures and pressures, such as their responsibility for maintaining the nuclear family. After a woman surmounts one problem, another looms ahead of her. Off to the right of center, a dancer halfway to the peak of her next obstacle embodies the endless struggle of Mexican women.

Álvarez Bravo also reinterprets types through the inclusion of the portrait head of Soriano, who was also informed by Surrealism, floating in water in the bottom left part of the composition. Soriano, became Álvarez Bravo’s muse and model, and his inclusion in the photomontage presents a fascinating reversal of the art historical trope of female objectification. Unlike a series of other photographs of Soriano by Álvarez Bravo, which depicted him either

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artfully lying on the beach or an up-close portrait of his face, this composition treats him as a subject that complicates concepts of masculinity. In a manner similar to the photomontages discussed earlier such as *Hilados del Norte I* (see Figure 2.1), where Álvarez Bravo presents disembodied inclusions of the male body, she reinterprets versions of masculinity with the Soriano portrait. She shows him as a floating, disembodied head with his eyes closed, seemingly dreaming of the ballerinas moving around him. The male figure does not perform an active role as technology wielder or glorified worker, but is seemingly inactive, with his eyes closed, perhaps sleeping and dreaming. His role and position within the manufactured scene is passive and secondary to the narrative that is occurring around him. The primary focus is not the male figure, as in most Mexican narrative works, but instead the male takes a subsidiary position to the female dancers.

**Conclusion**

The three photomontages discussed in this chapter show that Álvarez Bravo comments on gender primarily through recasting types of women in society seen through the unescorted young woman, the female scholar, and the mythic representation of the mermaid. This grouping of photomontages additionally marks a shift in design and execution from those discussed previously. In these works, Álvarez Bravo used certain aspects of Surrealist photomontage in order to more aptly address gender than in straight photography, such as creating hallucinatory, imagined landscapes. Moreover, unlike in earlier compositions Álvarez Bravo is not concerned with displaying innovative angles or asserting herself as female artistic challenger to the male

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105 Álvarez Bravo photographed Juan Soriano on numerous occasions, including on her various excursions to Veracruz and other areas of Mexico. These negatives are housed at the Center for Creative Photography at the University of Arizona in Tucson.
muralist. Instead, these final photomontages, as I have argued, are positioned as fine art that feature streamlined and refined details.
Conclusion

Lola Álvarez Bravo completed approximately thirty photomontages during the span of her fifty-year career; this study is limited to eight photomontages that range from the first examples created in 1935 to the last printed in 1958. A thorough investigation of these photomontages demonstrates that Álvarez Bravo was interested in challenging prevailing gender roles in a nuanced fashion that is not obvious at first glance. Though these works have received short shrift in the literature, they provided a site for experimentation that allowed the artist to explore gender themes in a different manner than straight photography. Álvarez Bravo considered and reflected on gender in her photomontages, as argued in this thesis, through form, iconography, and placement, which allowed her to recast traditional gender roles or types.

Through photomontage, Álvarez Bravo challenged, questioned, and resisted prevailing gender roles disseminated by the SEP and post-Revolutionary propaganda in the mid-1930s, industrialized Mexico in the 1940s, and film and advertising in the 1940s and 50s. Her photomontages, each specific to the time and type of commission, reflect the niche openings within the process of working with photomontage to examine and question gender norms and voice her feminist views. While it can be said that her female artistic contemporaries in Mexico such as María Izquierdo or Frida Kahlo made more explicit assertions in their work in regard to gender, Álvarez Bravo’s nuanced approach allowed her compositions to fit into the repertoire of images that were required for her myriad of commissions.106

The chapters have been arranged thematically, an approach that yields insight into the different ways that Álvarez Bravo strategically used at certain moments in her career and the

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106 In Elizabeth Ferrer’s 2006 monograph she charts the many the positions Álvarez Bravo held during her long career. For specific information, see Ferrer, Lola Alvarez Bravo (New York: Aperture, 2006).
increasingly overt ways in which her concerns with gender issues manifested over time. The first chapter demonstrates that Álvarez Bravo was employed to create compositions that would fit cohesively into the repertoire of propagandistic images mandated by the SEP in the mid-1930s. Thorough analysis of her photomontages during this period show that she did not necessarily agree with the narratives disseminated by the SEP, and instead used the medium as a means to reinterpret reigning narratives of motherhood and female subjugation through scenes of socioeconomic disparity. Similarly, the second chapter discusses Álvarez Bravo’s compositions that were conceived as photomurals and follow the same course of dismantling hegemonic dialogues about womanhood. In the photomurals she addresses gender by displaying varying degrees of masculinity, depicting the male body in the industrial landscape without agency, and asserting herself as challenger to the male muralist in Mexico. Her large-scale murals, which were conceived for business contexts or film sets, bring to light a discussion of gender and the body in the industrial landscape via the male dominated boardroom and the 1955 film *La Rival*. The final chapter discusses Álvarez Bravo’s studio work conceived in the 1940s. Similar to other examples, the artist addresses gender through recasting types and questioning cultural precedents. Unlike earlier examples of photomontage, however, these studio works feature aspects of Surrealism not only to address gender, but also to assert a more experimental mode of creation. The fine art photomontages feature streamlined and refined details and in them narratives of gender difference became more overt.

The eight photomontages that have been discussed, despite being created for the very different formats of the printed magazine, photomural, and for the studio, all address gender in some form and all utilize the formal specificities of photomontage to do so. Each of Álvarez Bravo’s photomontages functioned differently in distinctive formats, but overall confronted
dominant narratives of gender and gender roles through representations of motherhood, varying degrees of masculinity, or reinterpretation of previous models of womanhood.
Bibliography


Illustrations

Figure 1.1 *El Sueño de los Pobres*, 1935
Gelatin silver print
Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona
Figure 1.2 *El Capital, Hambriento de Sobre Trabajo*, 1935
Gelatin silver print
Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona
Figure 1.3 Front cover *El Maestro Rural*, Vol. 8 No. 8, 1936
Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona
Es indudable que el fortalecimiento de la raza humana depende, en gran parte, de la salud de los progenitores y de los niños que vienen al mundo.

Durante muchos años se tuvo a la mujer relegada a las quehaceres domésticos, curante de sol, de aire y de agua.

Sus ejercicios físicos se redujeron al mínimo, y si acaso, algunas veces se le contradió, como experimento, el baile, que en ocasiones resultaba enervante, por despertar en ella sentimientos morbosos.

Ahora, los deportes son cultivados por las mujeres, y esos ejercicios los hacen fuertes y las capacitan para que el funcionamiento fisiológico de su cuerpo haga más fácil el cumplimiento de su misión, aparte de que sea mejor su desarrollo mental.
Figure 1.5 Layout of *El Maestro Rural*
Volume 6 No. 8, 1935
SRLF Library, University of California, Los Angeles
Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona
Figure 1.6 Front cover of *El Maestro Rural*
Volume 6, No. 8, 1935
SRLF Library, University of California, Los Angeles
Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona
Figure 2.1 *Hilados del Norte 1*, 1944
Gelatin silver print
Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona
Figure 2.2 *Hilados del Norte II*, 1944
Gelatin silver print
Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona
Figure 2.3 *Anarquía Arquitectónica de la Cuidad de Mexico*, 1953
Gelatin silver print
Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona
Figure 2.4 Diego Rivera, *Detroit Industry, North Wall*, 1932–33
Fresco
Detroit Institute of Arts
Figure 2.5 Diego Rivera, *El Hombre en la Encrucijada*, 1934
Fresco
Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, Mexico
Los Arquitectos jóvenes de México que buscan afanosamente la expresión de una arquitectura mexicana moderna, han incorporado su esfuerzo al de los artistas de las artes plásticas, formando con ellos equipos de trabajo para realizar la obra, que por ser más que cualquier otra del dominio público, hace al pueblo posesor de la obra de sus artistas.

Ejemplos de este sistema de trabajo son:

El Edificio del Seguro Social,
el Banco de México en Veracruz,
la Ciudad Universitaria de México,
el nuevo edificio de la S. C. O. P.  
y varias más.

Dentro del grupo de arquitectos a los que me refiero, quedan incluidos los arquitectos Lorenzo Carrasco y Guillermo Rossell, quienes en su más reciente construcción: Nuevo edificio de oficinas para AutoMex, S. A., han acentuado una afortunada integración plástica de buena arquitectura, un elemento más que viene a sumarse a la pintura y a la escultura: el FOTOMURAL.

Dentro del concepto moderno de la arquitectónica, la fotografía como medio expresivo y decorativo logra una especial predilección de tema y dimensión, además de identificarse con lo físico y funcional (de la construcción).

La fotografía mural puede ser realizada: Fotomontaje o por la proyección de un solo tema real que permita aumentar perspectivas, paisaje, luminosidad, cosa que a su vez ofrece al espectador la posibilidad de transportarse rápidamente a un ambiente diferente.

En la decoración de muros, el uso del FOTOMONTAJE significa contar con un casi inagotable campo abierto a la creación, donde el tema y la composición misma son ricas en posibilidades descriptivas y temáticas propias al desarrollo de la fantasía, cualidades que además, no desvían el valor esencial del FOTOMURAL: su “realidad”, pues que ésta es perfectamente aprehensible debido a la facilidad de identificación de los imágenes: reproducción exacta (fotográfica) de objetos o seres reales.

Para el proyecto de Fotomontaje en el caso particular de la Chrysler de México, se tomaron en cuenta los elementos más representativos de ese tiempo: la máquina, el hombre y el movimiento (la fuerza motriz).

La composición representa la fuerza del hombre y de la máquina prestando su servicio, a través de la industria, a una ciudad moderna.

Figure 2.6 Espacios: Revista Integral de Arquitectura, Planificacion y Artes Plasticas, 18 (1954) Photomural for the boardroom of AutoMex. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Mexico, accessed May 21, 2016, http://fa.unam.mx/.
Figure 2.7 Unidentified photographer, stills from the motion picture *La Rival*, 1955
Collection of the Biblioteca de Arte Ricardo Pérez Escamilla
Figure 2.8 Fernando Leal, Hand colored engraving, frontispiece for Manuel Maples Arce, *Metroplis*, 1929
Figure 3.1 \textit{Universidad Femenina}, 1943
Gelatin silver print
Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona
Figure 3.2 *Las Sirenas con Maquina de Escribir (Sirenas del Aire)*, 1958
Gelatin silver print
Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona
Figure 3.3 *El Sueño del Ahogado*, 1945
Gelatin silver print with blue ink
Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona
Un pintor de la mujer

José Clemente Orozco

Mujeres de domingo, que me prometiste un
amplio "homenaje" a la mujer... Un poco... se me ha
pasado por la cabeza, que tal vez pueda hacerme
alguna... Porque yo no sé, soy un tonto...

Enrique Díaz de León, en "Homenaje a la mujer..."

Orozco, Verdad Cronológica.

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Figure 3.4 Untitled drawing by José Clemente Orozco used in José Juan Tablada, “Un pintor de
la mujer,” El Mundo Ilustrado, 1913.

Re-printed in Orozco, Verdad Cronológica.
Figure 3.5 José Clemente Orozco, *Colegiala*, 1912
Ink on paper
Re-printed in *Orozco, Verdad Cronológica.*
Figure 3.6 Max Ernst, *Here Everything Is Still Floating*, 1920
Cut-and-pasted printed paper and pencil on printed paper on cardstock
Museum of Modern Art, New York