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Art and Social Movements: Cultural Politics in Mexico and Aztlán

Edward J. McCaughan

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Art and Social Movements offers a comparative, cross-border analysis of the role of visual artists in three social movements from the late 1960s through the early 1990s: the 1968 student movement and related activist art collectives in Mexico City, a Zapotec indigenous struggle in Oaxaca, and the Chicano movement in California. Based on extensive archival research and interviews, Edward J. McCaughan explores how artists helped to shape the identities and visions of a generation of Mexican and Chicano activists by creating new visual discourses.

McCaughan argues that the social power of activist artists emanates from their ability to provoke people to see, think, and act in innovative ways. Artists, he claims, help to create visual languages and spaces through which activists can imagine and perform new collective identities and forms of meaningful citizenship. The artists' work that he discusses remains vital today—in movements demanding fuller democratic rights and social justice for working people, women, ethnic communities, immigrants, and sexual minorities throughout Mexico and the United States. Integrating insights from scholarship on the cultural politics of representation with structural analyses of specific historical contexts, McCaughan expands our understanding of social movements.

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