

## Alfredo Ramos Martínez: Works on Paper March 12 – April 23, 2022

Louis Stern Fine Arts is pleased to present a selection of works on paper by Alfredo Ramos Martínez (1871–1946). Considered by many to be the founding father of Mexican Modernism, Ramos Martínez was a prolific painter and muralist as well as an innovative teacher. While director of the Escuela Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Academy of Fine Arts) in Mexico City, he opened the first of his Escuelas de Pintura al Aire Libre (*plein air* schools) in 1913 and counted David Alfaro Siqueiros amongst his first students. Modernist painter Rufino Tamayo, who studied at the National Academy from 1917 through 1921, credited Ramos Martínez with directing him "toward Impressionism." Though subtler and more subdued than many of his contemporaries, such as the passionately political Mexican Muralists Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, and José Clemente Orozco, Ramos Martínez nonetheless quietly captured the complexities of his native Mexico in the years after the Mexican Revolution.

As modern Mexicans worked to forge a new national identity in the wake of the Revolution, a prevailing artistic theme of the Mexican Renaissance was the embrace of Mexico's Indigenous heritage. Celebration of these roots resonates in Ramos Martínez's reverent scenes of Indigenous family life, statuesque flower vendors, and vigorous men at work. This idyllic gaze is complicated by an iconic illustration of *La Malinche*, the Nahuatl woman who acted as interpreter, advisor, and consort to Hernán Cortés. The depiction of this controversial figure, considered to be the symbolic mother of the Mexican people by some and a traitor by others, confronts the viewer with the complex history of a modern Mexico built on a foundation of brutal conquest and assimilation.

On view are several works on newsprint, a material on which many of Ramos Martínez's most iconic works were executed. He is said to have always carried a Conté crayon in his pocket and made frequent use of both English and Spanish language newspapers. His practice of drawing on newsprint may have been motivated partially by its abundance, a habit which reportedly began when the artist ran out of drawing paper during a visit to Brittany. The use of this everyday material, however, as well as the artist's tendency to pull pages from the classified ad sections in particular, suggests a subtextual empathy and respect for the worker's struggle. Advertisements seeking maids and chauffeurs and enticements to "save 25%" peek through images of men stooped over their labor and slumped together in exhausted sleep. The dense rows of text form a scaffolding of sorts, the framework within which these figures toil.

Work by Alfredo Ramos Martínez has been exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Philadelphia Museum of Art; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; Dallas Museum of Art; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Monterrey (MARCO), Mexico; and Museo Nacional de Arte (MUNAL), Mexico City, among many others. His work is held in numerous public collections, including the Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art; Dallas Museum of Art; Los Angeles County Museum of Art; The Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, Los Angeles; Phoenix Art Museum; San Diego Museum of Art; San Francisco Museum of Modern Art; Santa Barbara Museum of Art; Seattle Art Museum; and The Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.