

## Graciela Iturbide's Mexico (G365)

These three photographs depict muxes—a hybrid third gender that is neither male nor female—as they are. Iturbide allows her subject's personalities to radiate. Some, like *Magnolia with Mirror*, are poised and elegant. Another, titled "Muxe" (1979), shows a muxe turning with comical, laissez-faire sexuality holding a cigarette. Iturbide is wonderful at capturing both historic pride and individual personalities in her work. Her pictures often frame people in distinct compositions, and reveal the story of the people and a place and the deeply connected histories between them.



*Muxe, Juchitan, 1979*



*Magnolia with Mirror/Magnolia con espejo, Juchitan, 1986*

- The muxe (MOO-shay) community lives in the quiet outskirts of the metropolitan region of Mexico among the Zapotec people in southern Oaxaca. Muxes challenge the patriarchal Mexican state run by "machismo."
- Muxes are respected contributors to their town, often working as artists and merchants amid the rest of Juchitán's working class of craft makers, artisans, beauticians and manufacturers. Muxes are not only respected, they are celebrated throughout Juchitán for their defiance of gender roles.
- Some but not all muxes dress in traditional attire with long skirts and huipiles (traditional garment worn by indigenous women from central Mexico).
- Muxes often but are not limited to wearing their hair in ponytails, using makeup and jewelry, and take on some of the characteristics of each gender. The muxes are an anomaly, officially recognized and accepted. Juchitecos (locals) are keenly aware and proud of this difference, "[a]nd pointing to muxes without rejection is part of a code of acceptance." Although muxes are distinguished from the general male population, they are neither devalued nor subjected to discrimination. Boys may occasionally be harassed or discriminated against by mestizo youth; but Zapotec parents, especially

mothers and women in general, readily "defend muxes and their rights to 'be themselves.'"" The prevailing view is that one does not choose to be, but is born, muxe because "'God made them that way.'



*Magnolia with Sombrero/Magnolia con sombrero, Juchitan, 1986*

- Muxes' status as a separate sex is reinforced by the fact that work in Juchitan is clearly gendered. A precondition for muxe identification with certain jobs is this clear sexual division of labor.
- Under these conditions, there are intermediate positions that can be best carried out by a third sex. One job defined as muxes' work is the production of paper ornaments for large community fiestas. Artistic work is typically defined as men's work, but the fiestas are left to the women.
- Most parents are not embarrassed or burdened by having a son who is muxe. On the contrary, to have a muxe child is a blessing because they generally do not abandon the home; they stay to help their parents.
- Because women are known as hard workers, a quality recognized and praised by men, when a man works hard, it is said that he "works like a woman." In addition to being hard working, muxes are believed to be the brightest and most gifted children. Parents generally consider them the most likely to get educated, but they will only be supported beyond the sixth grade if they demonstrate superior intellectual ability because of the cost of pursuing higher education.
- Muxes appear to place great value in the fact that they are socially accepted in society. When interviewed, Juan noted repeatedly that "[e]veryone respects me, my neighbors appreciate me, they value me, they like me, well, they like me as I am." As to his homosexuality, Juan noted that he was born that way and that by the age of ten he was already flirting with the boys, adding "I live happily the way I am because no one in my family chastises me, no one humiliates me; they accept me as I am."