



Portrait of José Mojica 1928 by Macena Barton 2018.69.1 ....currently in G322

**Spend a moment looking at this portrait created in 1928. What questions would you like to ask the artist? Or the man in the portrait?**

Jose Mojica was born in Mexico in 1895. The events of his life are amazing, but even more surprising is a choice he made that changed his life.

- Born in Jalisco he was raised on a **coffee and sugar plantation community until the age of six.**(Jalisco is the state next Michoacán where the Purépecha live)
- After his step-father Francisco died and his mother's extended family had financial problems, they moved to Mexico City where he went to school.
- The armed conflict of the Mexican Revolution/Counter Revolution of 1910-20 caused his school to close. **He also struggled personally with these events.** He began taking private voice lessons at the Conservatory of music. He also studied drama and was gifted in languages — learned English, Italian and French.
- He began his career as an operatic tenor in theater in Mexico. Shortly after the WWI began he moved to NYC and became an opera singer where he became friends with Enrico Caruso. Who profoundly promote his career as a tenor.
- Caruso introduced him to Thomas Edison who made extensive recordings of Mojica singing.
- Caruso connected Mojica to Hollywood where he sang in the 'talkies'. In CA he was among the few Mexican people who made history in the early years of **Hollywood** and was very much a part of the acting world. In Latin America he was a teen idol and was famous as “the Bing Crosby” of Latin America.

- The death of his mother in 1942 led him to reconsider his life. Two years later, he gave up his professional career and joined the Franciscan Order in Peru. He gave his considerable fortune to charity, endowed an orphanage, and went to Peru to enter the Franciscan order.
- **Mojica Quote:** “Our young men, with their eyes on material things, disdain the priesthood. But I, who have had in abundance all that our youths dream of possessing, say to you that all the world's gold, fame, power, applause and pleasure are not equal to one hour in the service of Christ.”
- He died in Peru in 1974.

**As you reflect on Mojica’s life, what clues has the artist included that tell his life story?**

**Behind Mojica there is a lighter area of shades of green. What does that say to you about Mojica?— There will be different interpretations of this!**

**Let’s spend a few moments on the artist who painted this. Her life was similar but also the polar opposite to Mojica in some ways but in other ways**



- **Macena Barton** was born in Michigan in 1901. She worked as a bank clerk and proofreader to support her studies at the Art Institute of Chicago from 1921 to 1925. To be a woman and a professional artist was unusual at the time.
- Her focus was on Post-Impressionism which explores the use of color. **Her paintings have been described as “strongly colored and strikingly bold.” In Mojica’s portrait, would you prefer more subtle colors OR do you like her choices?.... How did you decide?**
- Barton was a committed feminist who once challenged art critic Clarence Joseph Bulliet's assertion, in print, that no woman had ever painted a nude of the highest caliber.
- Macena Barton took the challenge — and has been claimed as the first American women artist to paint a nude self-portrait.

- She became a lover of the married Bulliet. He later described her as “**a defiant individualist: “blunt and outspoken, she tears down the curtains of shams—she’s as ‘primitive ’and ‘barbaric ’in her emotions as in her color lusts.”**
- Although their lives were were very different, both José Mojica and the artist were strong-willed, hard-working, and unafraid of challenges as they lived their lives. Imagine working together on this portrait!

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## Research

### Wikipedia

- **Fray José de Guadalupe Mojica** [mohe-cah] (14 September 1895 – 20 September 1974) was a [Mexican Franciscan friar](#) and former [tenor](#) and [film actor](#). He was known in the music and film fields as **José Mojica**.<sup>[1]</sup>
- He was among the few Mexican people who made history in the early years of [Hollywood](#).
- Regarding his activity as a friar, singer and actor, he felt that religion and art have never been at conflict. *If God gave me the grace of voice and singing skills, I use them for His glory*, he explained.<sup>[1]</sup>
- Born in [San Gabriel, Jalisco](#), Mojica was raised in a **coffee and sugar plantation community until the age of six**, after his step-father Francisco died. He never knew his real father. When his mother's extended family suffered financial challenges, they moved with limited means to [Mexico City](#) where he studied at the [Academy of San Carlos](#) and later attended the National School of Agriculture.<sup>[1]</sup>
- Mojica wrote about the Revolution and Counter Revolution, the closing of the military academy due to the [Mexican Revolution](#) armed conflict, and his personal struggle from these events, in his book "I, a Sinner".<sup>[2]</sup> This experience led him to find his true calling. He began taking private voice lessons while studying at the [National Conservatory of Music of Mexico](#).<sup>[2]</sup>
- While at the Conservatory, Mojica also developed skills in drama and displayed a particular gift for languages, there mastering English, Italian and French. He learned to play the guitar and Mexican songs and practiced dance, athletics and horse riding.<sup>[2]</sup> He would eventually begin working as an operatic tenor at the Teatro Ideal. On 5 October 1916 he debuted at the Teatro Arbeu, playing the [Count Almaviva](#) role in [Rossini's](#) opera *The Barber of Seville*.<sup>[1]</sup> The following year, he performed the role of [Rodrigo](#) in [Verdi's](#) *Otello*.<sup>[1]</sup>
- Shortly after the [United States](#) entered [World War I](#), funded with \$500, Mojica moved to [New York City](#) and worked petty jobs before joining an opera company. In his spare time, he attended performances of [Enrico Caruso](#) at the [Metropolitan Opera](#).<sup>[1]</sup> The famed Caruso, having met Mojica in 1919, was impressed with Mojica's vocal skills and helped him obtain a contract with the [Chicago Civic Opera](#) company.<sup>[3]</sup> He debuted on 22 November and performed the minor role of [Lord Arthur Bucklaw](#) in [Donizetti's](#) *Lucia di Lammermoor* that same year,<sup>[1]</sup> an opera loosely based upon Sir [Walter Scott's](#) historical novel *The Bride of Lammermoor*.<sup>[4]</sup>
- While in Chicago he landed secondary roles, with his career slowly gaining momentum in 1921 when playing leading parts in [Debussy's](#) *Pelléas et Mélisande* and [Prokofiev's](#) *The Love for Three Oranges*, the former alongside renowned [soprano Mary Garden](#).<sup>[5]</sup> Prokofiev attended Mojica's rehearsals where Mojica performed his first performance on 30 December, singing in French.<sup>[5]</sup> Mojica also befriended [Feodor Chaliapin](#) during the singer's visit to Chicago. Under Chaliapin's guidance, he played the role of [Shúyskiy](#) in [Mussorgsky's](#) *Boris Godunov*.<sup>[5]</sup>
- Caruso made two additional introductions that impacted his career. In the first. Caruso recommended Mojica to Edison to become one of Edison's Three Tenors. The second Caruso sending letters of introduction along with Mojica to Hollywood where young voices were needed to sing in 'talkies'. Going to California, and except for

individual trips back to Chicago and New York for singing engagements, his career continued in films in Hollywood and throughout Latin America.

- The versatility of Mojica is reflected in his extensive discography, which he recorded for Edison<sup>[6]</sup> and the Victor Talking Machine Company.<sup>[7]</sup>
- By the time Mojica recorded for Edison in 1925, he had become an important figure at the Chicago Opera, moving into principal roles. He left Edison and joined the Victor roster in 1927 and made several successful early sound films. He moved comfortably during the 1930s through the worlds of opera, film, and concerts, but left this milieu in 1943 to become a priest. Like Edison, Mojica would eventually become completely deaf.
- Much interesting stuff about his film career and home in Mexico where famous movie stars, directors visited.
- The death of his mother in 1942 led him to reconsider his life. Two years later, he gave up his professional career and joined the Franciscan Order in Peru, distributing his estate mainly to the religious order. But first he endowed an orphanage in San Miguel.

### NY Times obituary

- The golden voice and handsome profile of Jose Mojica made him a leading star of the-opera, the stage and the screen in North and South America.
- He started as a tenor, appearing at New York's Metropolitan Opera House and at the Chicago Civic Opera. He went on to the movies, making a succession of highly successful musical films in Hollywood; Mexico City and Buenos Aires.
- His debut at the Ideal Theater in Mexico City was a marked success, and he became famous in the Latin world as a teen-age idol, with a popularity equivalent to that of Bing Crosby's in the English-speaking world. Then, suddenly, in 1942, at the height of his career, his voice still strong, he left the world of the theater to enter a monastery.
- His 'mother had just died, and this perhaps led to his decision. He gave his considerable fortune to charity and went to Peru to enter the Franciscan order,
- "Our young men, with their eyes on material things, disdain the priesthood. But I, who have had in abundance all that our youths dream of possessing, say to you that all the world's gold, fame, power, applause and pleasure are not equal to one hour in the service of Christ."

Macena Barton, *Self-Portrait* (detail), undated, oil on canvas (36 by 20 inches), image courtesy of Mongerson Gallery, Chicago.

(All info on Macena Barton from <https://schwartzcollection.com/artist/macena-barton/>)



**Macena Barton 1901-1986**

- **Born in Union City, Michigan**, Macena Alberta Barton worked as a bank clerk and proofreader to support her studies at the **Art Institute of Chicago from 1921 to 1925**. There she was encouraged to study the works of the **Post-Impressionist masters**.
- Focusing from the beginning on the **nude and on portraiture**, Barton also painted numerous still-life images and later essayed straightforward cityscapes and **surrealist fantasies**.
- She debuted in the Art Institute's annual exhibitions in 1926 with the first of her many self-portraits. **Strongly colored and strikingly bold**, her paintings attracted immediate attention, and in 1929 Barton was given a small solo exhibition at the Art Institute. In the following decades, she participated in exhibitions across the U.S. and was particularly active in Chicago galleries and organizations.

#### **Clarence Joseph Bulliet — “The Challenge”**

- WIKIPEDIA: “**Barton was a committed feminist** who once **challenged art critic Clarence Joseph Bulliet's** assertion, in print, that **no woman had ever painted a nude of the highest caliber**,<sup>[5]</sup>
- **She has been claimed as the first American women artist to paint a nude self-portrait**;<sup>[2]</sup>
- **She later became a lover of the married Bulliet, with whom she frequently appeared in public.**
- **Claimed by conservatives for her technical mastery and by modernists for the disquieting frankness and sometimes gaudy colorism** of her paintings. She won critical praise equally from the *Chicago Tribune's* conservative Eleanor Jewett and from **Bulliet, a staunch champion of modernism, who described Barton as a defiant individualist: “blunt and outspoken, she tears down the curtains of shams—she’s as ‘primitive ’and ‘barbaric ’in her emotions as in her color lusts.”**  
Wendy Greenhouse, PhD



MACENA BARTON  
Portrait of Clarence J. Bulliet, circa 1935–1939

**Optional research resources:**

From the beginning of her career, Barton infused her paintings with elements of surrealism and fantasy, notably the auras with which she surrounded figures in her portraits of the early 1930s. This work is one of several clearly inspired by the burgeoning Space Age, particularly the popular culture of space fantasy manifested in pulp fiction, illustration, and cinema, among other mediums. **Now recognized as one of the foremost surrealist painters of her generation in Chicago.**



[Macena Barton](#) 1901-1986

Untitled (Flying Saucers with Snakes), dated 1961, Oil on canvas, 28 by 36 inches

