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Frank Mehring (Ed.)

The Mexico Diary

Winold Reiss between Vogue Mexico and Harlem Renaissance

An Illustrated Trilingual Edition with Commentary and Musical Interpretation

Foreword by Sydelle Rubin-Dienstfrey

Chronology by C. Ford Peatross with Renate Reiss

Commentary by Frank Mehring

Translations by Renate Reiss and Marietta Saavedra Arellano

Selections set to music and performed by Jens Barnieck and Frank Mehring

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Frank Mehring (Ed.). –
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I. Introduction: *The Mexico Diary*—Winold Reiss between Vogue Mexico and Harlem Renaissance

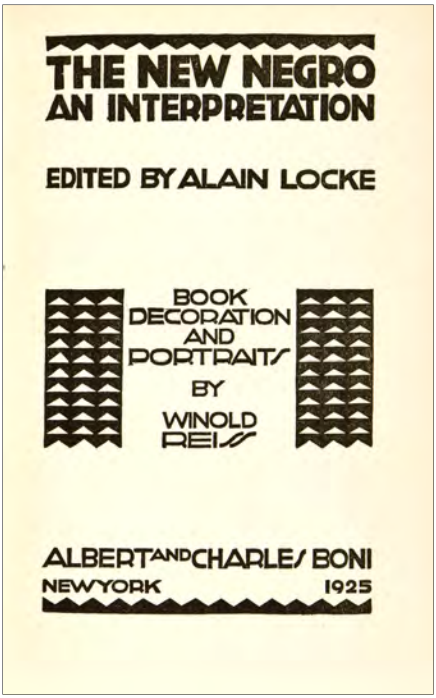
Frank Mehring

> I have to tell you again how much I liked to work with you and I only wish that we will have once an occasion in which we can prove just to all our ideals regardless of commercial people. It would make me very happy if my effort in helping your noble work would really be a small seed in the vast land that still has to be ploughed. Do not forget that you can always find me ready if you need help in your idealistic undertakings.
>
> —Winold Reiss to Alain Locke
> December 31, 1925

1. Remapping American Modernism

Anyone interested in the visual narrative of the Harlem Renaissance will sooner or later encounter the innovative artworks which the German American artist Winold Reiss (1886-1953) contributed to the founding document of the so-called Harlem Renaissance,[1] *The New Negro: An Interpretation*—an anthology of African American short stories and poems edited by Alain Locke and published in 1925. Reiss's portraits of African American writers, artists, and intellectuals such as Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Paul Robeson, or W.E.B. Du Bois remain the most visible reminders of his deep appreciation for the cause of racial pride, racial uplift, and recognition of African American culture. How and why did Winold Reiss become so influential in the visual Harlem Renaissance? I argue that he became the quintessential portrait artist of "Black Manhattan" in a roundabout way, by circling from New York to the Blackfeet reservation in Montana, to post-revolutionary Mexico, and back to New York City, all in 1920. It is amazing that few people have investigated the artist's intercultural background or questioned his presence in what became a turning point in African American self-recognition.

1 The term "Harlem Renaissance" uses the physical location "Harlem" to link the traumatic past of slavery with a new notion of self-esteem and self-recognition within the history of African American culture.



Ill. 1: Title page of *The New Negro* (1925) with design and lettering by W. Reiss.

Who was Winold Reiss? The immensely versatile German American painter, designer, and teacher was termed a "modern Cellini" in *Du Pont Magazine* (March 1931). However, defying instant categorization and labels, he remains something of a mystery to art critics. Born in Karlsruhe, Germany, Reiss studied in Munich with renowned artists and teachers Franz von Stuck and Julius Diez. He arrived in the U.S. in 1913, nine months before the outbreak of World War I, and emerged as an influential figure in modernist aesthetics and transatlantic encounters during the 1920s and '30s. He established his own art school and design studio in New York City's Greenwich Village, co-founded the art magazine *Modern Art Collector* and became known for his cutting-edge graphic design as well as for his portraits of influential artists and intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance, among them socialist and civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois, first internationally celebrated African American male concert artist Roland Hayes, and anthropologist and author Zora Neale Hurston. Reiss's work was widely exhibited and appeared in publications such as *Scribner's Magazine*, *Century Magazine*, *The Forum*, and *Survey Graphic*. He collaborated with leading artists and intellectuals including Katherine Anne Porter, Paul Kellogg, Miguel Covarrubias, Alain

Locke, and Langston Hughes. Among his students were Ruth Light Braun, known for her complex portraits of Jewish life in New York and Palestine, the mural artist Marion Greenwood, and the African American key figure of the visual Harlem Renaissance, Aaron Douglas. In addition to teaching in his own art school in New York City and conducting summer schools in Woodstock, New York and later in Glacier Park, Montana, he also taught at the New York School of Applied Design for Women, at the Keramic Society and Design Guild of New York, and at New York University's School of Architecture where he was appointed Assistant Professor of Mural Painting. His commissions range from interior designs for the New York City restaurants Crillon and Longchamps to the monumental mosaic murals at the Cincinnati Union Terminal.



Ill. 2: W. Reiss, *Langston Hughes*, 1926.

Winold Reiss stands at the beginning of a new approach to depicting the vitality of African American culture. While his name is mostly unfamiliar to art historians on both sides of the Atlantic, his student, the African American artist Aaron Douglas, is

usually credited with providing the iconic visual narrative of the Harlem Renaissance. The 2007 exhibition *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist*, organized by Susan Earle at the Spencer Museum of Art, in Lawrence, Kansas exemplifies the current cultural discourse on American modernism and overemphasizes Aaron Douglas's contribution to *The New Negro*.[2] While Douglas's drawings continue to dominate the discussion of African American portraiture in the 1920s and '30s, Reiss's efforts to promote the recognition of African American culture have received comparatively little attention. Art historian Richard Powell, however, asserts that Reiss provided the "classic images of the period" and "perfectly captured the common ground from which these newest structures and racial pre-occupations sprang" (Powell 2002, 42).[3] Reiss's transatlantic connections, contributions, and democratic vistas are less visible today than during his lifetime.[4] For example, only the first two editions of Locke's manifesto of the

2 Susan Earle, curator of European and American Art at the Spencer Museum of Art, explains in the exhibition catalogue "Douglas provided illustrations for the burgeoning magazines *The Crisis*, *Opportunity*, and *FIRE!!* He also served as the only African American illustrator of the defining book of the time, *The New Negro* (1925), contributing distinctive images that captured the era's new spirit and supplemented an impressive array of cultural and social texts by major talents of the day, including Jean Toomer, [Langston] Hughes, James Weldon Johnson, Jessie Fauset, Arthur A. Schomburg, Walter White, and [W.E.B.] Du Bois. This anthology helped laying the groundwork for the development of the liberationist path that the New Negro signified" (12). What is important here is what is not being said. Namely that the majority of the visual artwork of in *The New Negro* was created by the German immigrant painter who studied in Munich at the Royal Academy of Arts and at the School of Applied Arts and whose name is featured so prominently on the cover page of the first edition.

3 Richard Powell reminds scholars of Reiss's presence in the visual Harlem Renaissance in his overview *Black Art: A Cultural History*. His essay in *Aaron Douglas: African American Modernist* assures that Reiss is recognized within discussions of aesthetic developments. The 1987 traveling exhibition "Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America" also furthered the intrinsic connection between Harlem and African American history of ideas and art. While the term is indeed an "accurate yet elastic description of the levels and range of black creativity in the 1920s" (41) as Powell argues, it nevertheless hardly allows for the recognition of influential artists beyond the agency of African American productions. Thus, in the visual narratives of the Harlem Renaissance we usually find references to the photographer James Van Der Zee or to Douglas who holds a special place as quintessential "African American Modernist."

4 The scant recognition of Reiss's innovative approaches to poster art, lettering, and interior design stems to a certain degree from the continuing stigma of commercial art among art historians. For an excellent introduction and overview of Reiss's translation of German concepts of decorative arts to the American context see C. Ford Peatross, "Winold Reiss: A Pioneer of Modern American Design." Jeffrey Stewart offers an introduction to Reiss's life and his dedication to drawing ethnic minorities in North America in the excellent catalogue *To Color America: Portraits by Winold Reiss*, which accompanied a major exhibition at the Smithsonian Institution's National Portrait Gallery in 1989. Invaluable research on Reiss's artistic background and his New York-based art school is offered by Fred Brauen in his manuscript *Winold Reiss (1886-1953):*

Harlem Renaissance feature sixteen of Reiss's color illustrations of leading members of the "New Negro" movement and one color reproduction of an imaginative called "African Phantasy: Awakening." Later editions only reprinted his black and white book decorations. Thus, much of his innovate foray into a bold use of color, which he had brought from his training at the Royal Academy of Arts and the School of Applied Arts in Munich, has become invisible. The 1992 re-edition of *The New Negro* lacks several elements of Reiss's graphic design work as well as the stunning color portraits, the most striking feature of the first edition.[5]

In her seminal publication *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935*, Wanda Corn has speculated that Reiss's work may indeed embarrass scholars. Recent scholarship on the Harlem Renaissance such as in *The Cambridge Companion to the Harlem Renaissance* by George Hutchinson and Sieglinde Lemke's *Primitivist Modernism: Black Culture and the Origins of Transatlantic Modernism* has shifted the focus from individual figures to racial interactions, crossovers, and transatlantic interchanges. Caroline Goeser has brought attention to Reiss's ground-breaking illustrations for book covers in her comprehensive comparative analysis *Picturing the New Negro: Harlem Renaissance Print Culture and Modern Black Identity*.

What triggered Reiss's interest in and dedication to issues of racial uplift? Why, of all people, did a German immigrant feel compelled to provide the visual narrative for the "New Negro" movement? A key to understanding this, I argue, can be found in a diary, which Winold Reiss wrote while on a two-month-long trip to Mexico from October 5 to December 10, 1920. After a creative and personal crisis in New York, this journey became an epiphany for Reiss. It prepared him to critically engage with issues of racial segregation and African American recognition, and to come to terms with his own disillusionment regarding the promise of American democracy.

Examining the *Mexico Diary* helps us to better understand the function of Mexican art, folklore, religiosity, and the history of the *mestizaje* in the context of the stylizations of the cultural space, which James Weldon Johnson called "Black Manhattan." Reiss shares cosmopolitan notions, which the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos put forth in *La Raza Cósmica (The Cosmic Race)* in the early 1920s. Like Reiss, Vasconcelos outlined a new age, the aesthetic era, in which joy, love, and creativity would conquer the rationalism, materialism, and racial hatred of the present age.

Color and Design in the New American Art (1980). This work is difficult to locate. The New York Public Library has a photocopy.

5 Amy Helene Kirschke's analysis of Aaron Douglas's mural artwork in "The Fisk Murals Revealed" emphasizes the "flat style of synthetic Cubism and Matisse" and especially "the work of the European painters Robert Delaunay and Frantisek Kupka and the American Stanton MacDonald Wright" (116). However, it falls short of addressing the obvious significance of the role, which the German immigrant artist and Douglas's mentor, Winold Reiss, played in defining the nature of African American art in the 1920s.

In the 1920s and early 1930s, the Latin American and Mexican presence—"Vogue Mexico"—was particularly strong in the New York art scene. However, as Deborah Cullen recently lamented, comparatively little scholarly attention has been paid to the intercultural encounters and productive artistic exchanges generated by those artists "from Central and South America who gravitated to the city before and between wars" (10).[6] The goals of the *Mexicanidad* movement and the search for a new form of recognition underlying the "New Negro" concept feature fascinating similarities. The German immigrant Winold Reiss who is captivated by Mexican traditions, and has close ties to the New York art scene as well as to the American advertising industry, functions as a cultural interlocutor for Aaron Douglas, Alain Locke, Langston Hughes, Nella Larsen, and other Harlem artists. He has profoundly shaped the visual developments today associated with the Jazz Age.

Reiss's manuscript *Mexico Diary* offers a glimpse into the artist's mind and into the shaping of what would soon be developed most forcefully in the visual narrative of *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (1925). The diary is written in German and contains three elements: (1) matter-of-fact travel information regarding Mexican places, spaces, and people; (2) meditations on the function of color in Mexican landscapes (these passages also identify people and locations portrayed by Reiss); and (3) critical observations on borders and philosophical reflections on issues of gender constructions, racial conflicts, and the function of art in metropolitan cities.

There are three manuscript versions. The first version was written during his trip; the text is handwritten in ink, pencil, and color pencil on loose sheets of paper of various types and sizes, without titles or page numbers. These notes cover the entire journey and appear to be the earliest draft. Since Reiss scribbled his impressions and ideas "on the go" and often in a hurry, they have a unique sense of immediacy. Here we have a rare opportunity to enter into the artist's mind. There are lengthy passages in which Reiss records his feelings and observations regarding colors, sounds, landscapes, and people. He ends his account by referring to his other efforts in the field of creative writing: "I therewith close this book and put it with all the rest of my poems and writ-

6 Among the trailblazing works rank Jacqueline Barnitz's *Latin American Artists in the U.S. Before 1950* (1981), *The Latin American Spirit: Art and Artists in the United States, 1920-1970* (1988) by Louis R. Cancel et al., and Mari Carmen Ramírez's and Hécto Olea's *Inverted Utopias: Avant-Garde Art in Latin America* (2004). Instead of merely focusing on individual artists, scholars such as Deborah Cullen, Katherine E. Manthorne, Evis Fuentes, Antonio Saborit, Cecilia de Torres, James Wechseler, Michele Greet, or Katy Rogers have turned to analyzing moments of intercultural and artistic exchange. See the recent catalogue *Nexus New York: Latin/American Artists in the Modern Metropolis* edited by Deborah Cullen. This scholarship continues intercultural research to emphasize the complex international dimension of American modernism along the lines of Ann Douglas's *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s*, and Wanda Corn's *The Great American Thing: Modern Art and National Identity, 1915-1935*.

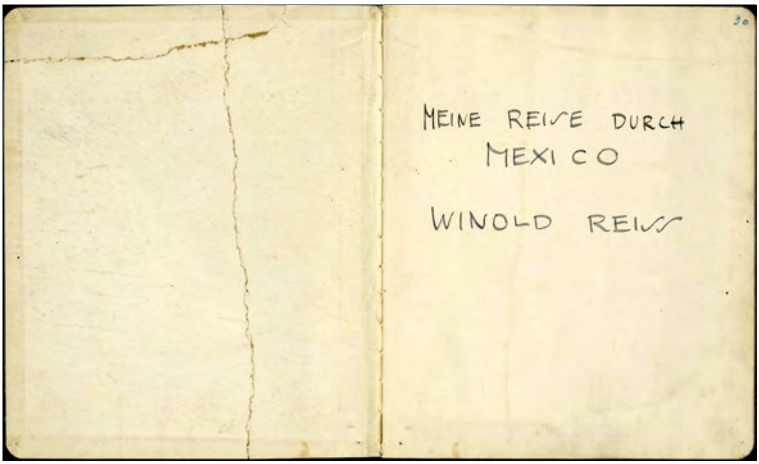
ings." After his return to New York City, he revisited his diary. The second version is also handwritten, in ink on lined, loose sheets of paper, and has various interesting revisions. This manuscript covers only the time from October 5-9. Again, the pages are untitled and without page numbers.[7] What is crucial and revealing here, however, is that Reiss made an explicit connection between text and actual drawings created on the spot: on the page opposite his reference "Papa und Mama Barbier," he notes "Bild I. und Bild II." This practice suggests that Reiss had in mind a textual and visual approach to capturing his Mexican experience. This becomes even more explicit in the third version, which represents a careful transfer of text handwritten in block letters in ink into an 8" x 6 1/2" bound notebook, with some editorial changes. While the first and second manuscript versions do not have a cover page, the third version features the title "Meine Reise durch Mexico"—my travels through Mexico.[8]

Considering that there are three versions, it seems likely that Reiss intended to publish the account in the 1920s. After all, travel accounts to Mexico with lush illustrations had become fashionable in the United States as *Mexico and Her People To-Day: An Account of the Customs, Characteristics, Amusements, History and Advancement of the Mexicans, and the Development and Resources of their Country* by Nevin O. Winter or Diego Rivera's illustrations for Stuart Chase's trailblazing book *Mexico: A Study of Two Americas* aptly show. However, Reiss's editorial work and the transfer from the original sketches remain incomplete. We can only speculate about the reasons why Reiss abandoned the project of revising and publishing. For one thing, the multitalented artist, who easily transgressed the (artificial) boundaries of commercial design and the fine arts, was high in demand so that he hardly had time to polish his literary work. Also, the negative presentation of U.S. American culture in the diary combined with a rather celebratory tone of everything Mexican resembles a self-defeating project for somebody who is interested in commercial opportunities in the urban centers of the United States.

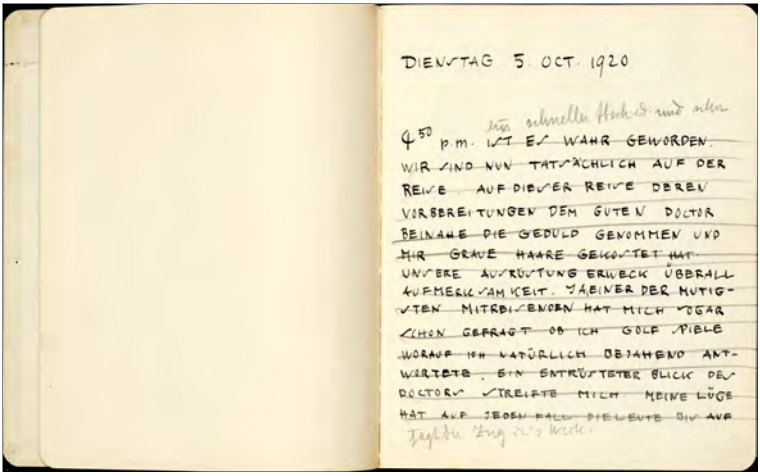
The publication of the diary presents a remarkable opportunity to enter into the mind of this German-American artist, to experience with him the sights, sounds, and smells of Mexican landscapes, encounter its people, and connect the feelings he describes with the drawings and paintings he created during and immediately after his trip. The diary's original German text is followed by translations into English and Spanish. Thumbnails of works relating to the narrative are inserted into the text and are reproduced separately in the final section of this book.

7 Its first entry is incorrectly dated "1922."

8 The third manuscript is similar to the second version but further revised and edited. Its second entry is incorrectly dated "1921."



Ill. 3: Title page, *Mexico Diary*, Manuscript Version III.



Ill. 4: First page, *Mexico Diary*, Manuscript Version III.

Reiss's visual narrative of American ethnicity has a German element woven into its fabric.[9] In order to critically reassess his work in fine arts and in commercial design, I

9 In order to retrace Winold Reiss's centrality in transatlantic modernism I will rethink Reiss's part in the visual representation of ethnic American identities. My approach builds on and goes beyond the groundbreaking work of Jeffrey Stewart, who introduced a selection of Reiss's portraits in the 1989 exhibition "To Color America" at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D.C. The European artistic background, which

use the recent manifesto on *Cultural Mobility* by cultural critic Stephen Greenblatt as a model for understanding the complexity of Reiss's German-American experience encoded in his art. My analysis of the *Mexico Diary* therefore needs to transgress the discipline of art history in order to shed light on contact zones arising from intercultural migration and the exchange of cultural as well as artistic ideas. From this perspective, Winold Reiss emerges as a cultural "mobilizer" who, in the sense of Greenblatt, can be understood as an agent, go-between, translator, and intermediator (251). The *Mexico Diary* enables us to address questions of cultural mobility, retrace processes of intercultural translation and moments of transcultural confrontations. The diary provides a pathway to discover a fascinating detour, which led the German immigrant to his commitment to African American culture. At the same time, Winold Reiss's *Mexico Diary* and the Latin American Nexus of *The New Negro* will contribute to recognizing "Harlem" as a transcultural space in a new way.[10]

Reiss brought to the American scene, demands a specific interdisciplinary and international perspective. In his review of Reiss's book *You Can Design* (1939), Philip McMahon suggested that even in the works of his students appeared to be echoes of Europe, transformed and diluted by time and distance in their transmission from the Old to the New World.

10 By pointing towards the international background of prominent figures like Alain Locke, Paul Robeson, Josephine Baker, and Langston Hughes, scholars such as Jeffrey Stewart and George Hutchinson emphasize in the recent *Cambridge Companion to The Harlem Renaissance* (2007) the "black internationalist" lens on African roots. This focus could clearly be defined as American (4). I follow Michael A. Chaney who argues that the centralization of what he calls "self-directed 'Negro' arts and letters" in Harlem needs to be conceived in international contexts (41). This conception should not only reveal the complex intercultural and interracial networks but also reflect the international mobility of black representatives of the Harlem Renaissance such as the expatriate experience of Du Bois during his two-year graduate study in Germany, James Weldon Johnson's three-year experience as United States consul in Puerto Cabello, Venezuela, or Langston Hughes who taught English in Mexico before he became a world traveler like Richard Wright and James Baldwin after him. In this seemingly boundless international sphere, the district of Harlem assumed the function of an anchor and ultimate point of reference for the African American diasporic art scene. I would like to suggest that agency is not lost but rather strengthened if we look at international and interracial forms of collaborations and spatial imaginations. The literary, musical, and visual stylizations of the physical space around Lennox Avenue in the district of Harlem reveal that the perceptions of space are constructs shaped by the perceptions and political interests of the artists. In the process of writing or painting, the physical space is translated into an artistic object. The concrete geographical region of "Harlem" functions as a signifier for a new perspective on African American creativity and culture. Thereby we can observe a process in which space is turned into an aesthetic object in the sense of Winfried Fluck. As a premise for my analysis and revisionist approach to "Harlem," with Reiss as a paradigm for intercultural encounters and confrontations, I would like to use his definition of space as aesthetic object as a starting point. "In order to gain cultural meaning, physical space has to become mental space or, more precisely, imaginary space" (25). I would like to look at some of the processes that take place when the phys-



Ill. 40: W. Reiss, *Alain Locke*, 1925.

6. Conclusion

The search for a new race of great and selfless men took shape in Mexico and drew Reiss to the issue of the color line (in the Du Boisian sense) back in New York. The *Mexico Diary* and the artwork of Reiss's Mexican experience reconfigure familiar visual narratives of the Harlem Renaissance in a transnational context. Reiss was certainly aware of the strong anti-Mexican sentiments among Americans. Being an immigrant himself, he could well recognize the difference in socio-political status between European and Mexican immigrants. The quality of discrimination and xenophobia suffered by European immigrants during the major waves of immigration in the nineteenth century was different from what historians such as Manuel G. Gonzales described as "the great migration" (137). The Mexican immigrants were mostly mestizo and Indian who had worked as peasants. In the 1920s, the racial otherness of Mexicans became pronounced in various ways. Gonzales argues that harsh racist views of white Americans

functioned as a "justification for the exploitation of Mexicans" and their continual ill-treatment (137). Exhibitions of Reiss's Mexican portraits and his efforts to create a kind of public art, which emphasized a positive perspective on Mexican history, culture, and its people, set a persuasive counterpoint to the dominant Eurocentric perspective of racial superiority.

Reiss criticizes specific developments in modern American urban, industrial societies by positioning Mexican people in an idealized space defined by spiritual integrity, healthy work ethic, patriarch family structures, and colorful sunny landscapes. On canvas, poverty is aestheticized via the beauty of what Reiss describes as pure "Mexican types." The portraits function as a healthy antidote to the despair and uniformity of American modern urban dwellers deprived of joy in the daily routines of working in factories and cramped into housing blocks where sunlight hardly pierces through.



Ill. 41: W. Reiss, *Aztec Woman and Child, Tepotzotlán*, 1920.



Ill. 42: W. Reiss, *The Brown Madonna*. Frontispiece in *The New Negro* (1925).

In New York, Reiss's colorful, joyous, celebratory images left a particularly strong impression. Before the great migration of Mexicans in the 1920s, New York had seen another great migration of African Americans, whose cultural presence had been inscribed in American entertainment in a much more thorough way than that of Mexicans. Aware of the history of slavery, exploitation, lynching, and the struggle for civil rights, Reiss felt drawn to the cause of African American intellectuals in Harlem after the spiritual renewal he experienced during his trip through Mexico. When he ends his diary with a prophetic insight that after thirty-four years he had finally come to realize in which direction he needed to take his artistry, one might argue that he found in Alain Locke a collaborator who embraced Reiss's dedication regarding the transnational ideal of American togetherness. The image of the Mexican Madonna *Aztec*

Woman and Child, Tepotzotlán (Ill. 41) finds its counterpart in the *Brown Madonna* on the frontispiece of *The New Negro* anthology. Mexican fantasies give way to African fantasies. The spirit inscribed in the faces of Aztecs from Tepotzotlán or Oberammergau Passion Players becomes the basis for the iconographic portraits of African American intellectuals and artists.

Reiss's portraits of African Americans blend a longing for rustic German peasant life[41] with the fantasy of a pre-Columbian harmony between land and people in Mexico. They clearly express his efforts to fashion himself as a central, vital, and innovative artistic force from Germany in the metropolitan center of New York. Reiss's contributions to the "New Negro" movement and his support of the African American cause of racial uplift through the means of portraiture, graphic design, and interior design emerge as an artistic response from the intercultural encounters he experienced south of the Rio Grande. From this perspective it becomes apparent why Reiss considered Alain Locke a friend who was fighting for a similar cause. As he wrote on December 31, 1925,

> It would make me very happy if my effort in helping your noble work would really be a small seed in the vast land that still has to be ploughed. Do not forget that you can always find me ready if you need help in your idealistic undertakings. (Locke Papers, Howard University)

The analysis of Winold Reiss's stylistic development reveals that the iconic visual language of the Harlem Renaissance has its roots in transatlantic and Latin American encounters. In his article "Draughtsmanship and Racial Types: Mexican Character Studies by Winold Reiss" (May 1921), M.D.C. Crawford argued that Reiss's "mental pictures of the Indians of Mexico will perhaps not stand the cold analysis of historic fact. But yet in his enthusiasm for a great art now rapidly disappearing, in his interest in types that must one day so completely merge as to leave little trace—not alone the public, but the scholar may find much that is interesting and much that is suggestive" (29). Now that we are able to revisit the rich visual artwork, which Reiss produced at the beginning of the "Vogue Mexico" and in the early phase of the Harlem Renaissance, Crawford's conviction that the artworks are a critical "commentary on the American lack of appreciation of things American" (29) gains new currency. Almost one hundred years ago, Crawford presented Reiss as a "foreign artist," who is able to show the artistic wealth of American landscapes and people. Today the *Mexico Diary* shows us that Winold Reiss was indeed an innovative, albeit at present hardly visible cultural "mobilizer," a vital force in transnational modernism worthy of recognition.

41 For Reiss's approach to portraying Black Forest peasants see my article "Portraying Transnational America."

II. The Mexico Diary of Winold Reiss

Note on the Diary Text

There exist three sets of notes Winold Reiss wrote about his Mexico trip, all in German with a sprinkling of English here and there. The most complete set ("Version I") covers his entire journey from October 5 to December 12, 1920. Written in longhand, with ink, pencil and color pencil on various loose sheets—mostly lined 2-hole punched 9 1/2" x 7 1/2" (24 x 19 cm) note paper—and without title or page numbers, these notes appear to have been written on the spot, at times in haste. The second set ("Version II") is an edited version of the opening part of Version I, covering the days of October 5 through 9. It is written longhand in ink on loose sheets of 10 1/4" x 7 1/4" (26 x 18.4 cm) lined paper, without title or page numbers, and the year in the opening entry is misstated as "1922". The third set ("Version III") is handwritten in block letters in a bound 8 1/2" x 7" (20.3 x 16.5 cm) notebook, in ink with further edits in pencil, and features the title *Meine Reise durch Mexico*. This text is similar to Version II, and its second entry misstates the year as "1921".

The present publication is based on Version I. Of primary importance in editing and translating was preserving the diary's originality and sense of immediacy. Editing has been kept to a minimum, retaining Reiss's style and his use of American (or Germanized American) words such as "Moviehäuser", "Smoker", "Blankets" or "Ranchowner". Original spelling, punctuation and geographical names have been adapted to modern usage. Reiss would note dates either in German or in English, if at all, often stating merely "in the morning" or "the next day." To the extent possible a timeline has been reconstructed, and dates have been added in brackets. Where it seemed advisable paragraph breaks have been adjusted to facilitate the flow of reading.

For ease of reference a map has been created which shows locations described in the diary.

Small images of works created by Reiss during his trip (or relating to it) have been placed within the diary text either where specifically mentioned or where it seemed fitting. These thumbnails point to larger format reproductions in the color plate section. In picture titles containing place names present day (rather than historic) spelling is used, though original or subsequently published titles may differ. Unfortunately it has not been possible to locate and obtain images of all the works mentioned in the text.

My Travels through Mexico

Winold Reiss

Tuesday, October 5, 1920

At 4:50 in the afternoon it became reality. We are now indeed on our way. Preparations for this trip have given me gray hair and nearly robbed the good doctor of his patience. Our outfit draws attention everywhere. Actually, one of the more courageous fellow passengers has asked me if I play golf, whereupon I replied with a studied inflection "certainly." An indignant flash from the Doctor's eyes practically knocked me down. In any case, my lie satisfied people, and now when we go to the dining car, only admiring and understanding looks follow us, which is of course very pleasant.



Pl. 1: *Mexican Fantasy*

Just now the Doctor is in the smoking car conversing with a Russian oilman he met on the train and smokes a dark and rather good smelling cigar. The two talk about oil and such. I look out over the plains into a nature that is unchanging and search already for wide-brimmed hats and dark eyes. Meanwhile we are actually only nearing the Mississippi. The train speeds madly on, and my thoughts which really ought to be forward-looking quite often flash back to the miserable artist ragtag that rolls through the metropolis come night. Another two hours to St. Louis.

I am leaving America without sentimentality though I should be a bit sad. Forward into the Promised Land. I want it all.



Pl. 2: *Rio Grande*

Thursday, October 7, 1920

On the train St. Louis-Laredo.

At 4:50 yesterday afternoon across the Mississippi to St. Louis. Great expectations, what kind of a city would show itself to us? The Doctor was here fourteen years ago and spoke admiringly of a huge, beautiful train station. Thus my imaginative brain anticipated to see something like that, and yes, the disappointment was cruel. What was huge fourteen years ago is small today, and what was once white and new is black and dirty today.

St. Louis, judging from the train station and its surroundings, is an impossibly filthy city. A walk such as ours during our stopover of an hour and a half could drive one from melancholy to suicide. All soot and no beauty. People with disgusted faces loiter around brightly lit shops like moths that fly into lamps at night. No laughter—only grimaces. An authentic picture of an industrial city the wealth of which is built at the expense of beings who hardly resemble humans anymore. If they ever awake and find out what real life is, then it's all over. They will not leave a single stone standing, they will trash it all. I can understand it. I pity these people who do not know beauty and seek to satisfy the hunger of their souls in cheap movie houses.

When the train carried us out of this atmosphere at 7 o'clock it was like driving towards paradise. Never mind where to, just out of there. At supper in the dining car a pastor who sat with us at the table began a conversation. Cursed like a fishwife about England, told of his trip through Ireland, and gradually grew so friendly toward things German that I had to give the Doctor a nudge under the table as a sign to clear out. We did, tossed down a nip of whisky and went to bed. The Doctor in the lower, I in the upper.



Pl. 3: *Yaqui Indian from Northern Mexico*

Today [October 7] we are in Arkansas. The scenery from the train is forested, interrupted by cotton fields. Here and there a house, rather a hut, with negro children playing in front. On rust-brown roads riders and wagons loaded with cotton, and over everything a hot sun. Just now the train speeds into Texas. Landscape the same. I would rather be out there, roaming through these forests and above all work. Next to us Spanish is already being spoken, incomprehensible to me. The Doctor applies himself eagerly to his Spanish book. I hope we come to the border soon. Sitting is tiring, the blood becomes too thick.

All day long through Texas to San Antonio. Arrival at 10:30 at night. There is already a Mexican atmosphere. Our train to Laredo was filled with Mexicans—very wild, at first sinister-looking fellows. One has to get used to it.

In the morning of October 8th, arrival in Laredo at the border. Great excitement. The picture is already different. Colors and these people. Simply inspiring. We quickly took care of our things and drove by car over the Rio Grande to Mexico. Along the way, before crossing the bridge, passport control on the American side. Very amiable people everywhere. On the Mexican side all went smoothly as well. As soon as one comes to New Laredo the picture changes abruptly. Right away one sees those riders known from movies, with sombreros and large spurs, on very small, lively horses. Naturally each one carries one or two pistols and a red shawl over the shoulder.

Thus they ride through the streets through which all the poor, dirty folk push. At first a very strange sight. Autos and horses race by, fellows call out offering fruit and news-

papers—picturesque confusion, and yesterday such heat, that I expected the sun would knock me out. We carried our bags to a hotel. Laughable "hotel," a shack with an entrance, and a large courtyard surrounded by rooms. Everything very, very primitive. God knows I haven't ever seen anything like this. There we left our bags and we both felt very concerned about theft. Therefore I guarded the building for about half an hour while the Doctor went to the train station. As I was walking back and forth a barber called me over to his door. A conversation ensued, as far as my ignorance of Spanish would allow, but as soon as the gathering crowd heard that I was Aleman, the friendship was forged.

O amigo–amigo! On his return the Doctor found me already well befriended, and the good old barber was the first to fall victim to my sketching. I drew him. His wife appeared, with a wonderful expression in her eyes. I drew her, too. Lunch was bad and expensive. After eating we met two Americans who came from Tampico. Awful fellows. One of them, a fat one, I even had to draw. There was heavy drinking. Especially the Doctor got into it and guzzled down many a bottle of Pilsner. I stuck with the soda. None of the water was fit to drink. This afternoon, I tried several times to find some fellows to pose. No success. I almost instigated a fistfight. It is not so easy—the Doctor already speaks Spanish quite courageously and well, and uses every second at it. He mixes up words here and there, which only makes the situation more charming. I think that we'll manage quite well. In the evening after one more luggage inspection, we finally made our way through endless crowds of people into the Pullman where we are at this moment on our way to Mexico City.



Pl. 4: *A Spaniard from Laredo*



Pl. 5: *Spanish Woman from Laredo*

Mexican Pullmans of course cannot compare to the American ones. First of all the train has only one, and no dining car. The toilets are miserable, dirty. In the evening a big brown beetle ran across my nose. The heat in the car was unbearable. Therefore sleep is not refreshing. I want to drink all the time.

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but not marring either, as their tones blend very well into the whole. The old monastery courtyard with an immense mass of colorful flowers made a fairy-like impression. In one corner stood some Indians—a priest came down the stairs, one of those fat and inflated ones. With unbelievable arrogance he allowed the Indians to kiss his hands and disappeared with them into the vestry. These representatives of a once well-intentioned religion that caused the greatest misfortune in the world, have really and truly taken away beauty from these Indians, and they ought to be punished for it. Both the Doctor and I had the same thoughts, and although the sun shone ever so golden and the church stood ever so majestically, the bitter taste left by this small, insignificant-seeming affair remained rather long. The evening found us in Mexico City. Soon to bed.



Pl. 8: *Funeral in Guadalupe*

And on Monday, the 11th [of October], to the American consulate. Cool reception—dumb questions and new passport pictures. In the afternoon, Guadalupe and an unforgettable experience. Truest Mexico. Again colors and Indians. Preparations for a grand church fiesta. Setting up merry-go-rounds. Vendors, shouting and crowding as I have never seen before. Everywhere types so beautiful you could scream. I was helpless in these surroundings, not knowing where to begin. Late in the afternoon, I finally decided on a motif, an approach to the cemetery with colorful houses. All the folk crowded around me, the bells were ringing, Indian music in the distance—an incredible feeling of bliss and forgetting of my American years —absolute oblivion.

Guadalupe is probably the most beautiful place we have seen so far. It is a fairytale— like a thousand years ago and has nothing base, only an oddly strange sacredness that is bound to have an effect on heathens, too. Such as the Doctor and myself.

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Thursday, October 14, 1920

Up early. Decamp at a quarter past six with Mr. Vogel. One hour on the electric to La Venta. From there by foot to the Desierto monastery. Fir forest like in the Black Forest. The same resinous air. Always uphill. I feel the altitude, have difficulty breathing now and then and cannot go as fast as usual. Once again real tall fir trees, *heimat* (homeland), and all that in Mexico. Such contrasts! We reached the monastery in forty-five minutes. Entirely in ruins the monastery presents a rare and original picture amidst this high forest. We were up on the steeple, underground in the crypt, in the echo chapel—little has survived. The government is trying though to restore the monastery. All throughout the Zapata insurrection renovation was halted as the group prohibited the work. I drew a young Indian who stood at the gate of the monastery.

Marched on after a brief rest. Deeper and higher into the high forest. We passed the old aqueduct and reached a ridge. Here was a magnificent view. Valleys and mountains. Villages and white paths. Everything glittering in the sun. I couldn't fight off the



Pl. 9: *Candelario Segura, Mucoloac, D.F.*

impression that I was in the Schwarzwald (Black Forest). A snack of bread and oranges, with much ambience and in the company of two soldiers on guard duty in the forest. I drew the two fellows as well. Later a wonderful path through fir forest into the valley. Out of the forest back into southern vegetation. Pulque plants and cacti.

As we continued to march down into the valley and just as we came through shrubs into a clearing, we encountered an old Indian woman. Was it our hurried downhill walk, or the noise of our voices, or our appearance, which frightened this poor woman? I do not know. Imploringly she raised her hands to the sky and begged us not to harm her as she only wanted to fetch wood. While doing this, she moved her hands with admirable grace and turned her body as if in a dance. Mr. Vogel who of course was the only one who understood the woman calmed her and gave her ten centavos. That consoled her, only she could not understand why I was walking without a hat. Nobody in Mexico walks without a hat, and if he does it is because he has lost it.



Pl. 10: *Indian Boy from Acopilco*

A wonderful climb to a village (Acopilco). On the way we passed a wide street where Indians made their way to town with mats and baskets—an altogether oriental looking landscape. Women and men and even children carry the heaviest loads for hours, but they do not walk as we do, they have a kind of a bounce. That probably cushions the body better, making the load seem less heavy.

In this village, which is reminiscent of Tyrol because of its stone-weighted roofs, I immediately started drawing an old Indian woman. A mass of boys gathered around and stared. There has probably never been a painter there. Vogel and the Doctor went to the village on a discovery tour. They brought back Pulque, and willing or unwilling, I had to drink a glass. Pulque is the national drink of the Mexicans. It is derived from a plant, it is sucked out of the plant, the juice is fermented, and it is ready to drink. It looks like sour milk, smells very unpleasant but tastes very good, and if one is thirsty, the only refreshment. Of course alcoholic. Children are given this drink already when one or two years old. I drew a beautiful, healthy looking girl, and for this privilege had to make a drawing of her sister's child and give it to her.

Suddenly it rained a little, the sky had become overcast. The first rain in Mexico! Vogel and the Doctor pressed on for we had to catch the tram. One hour's walk. Once more down and up. The last stretch running. Breathless we reached the tram. God knows, I cannot run here. Immediately lose my breath. I sat as one dead in the tram.

Dinner at Deutsches Haus. Very good. Homely fare, a piece of Germany in Mexico.

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Sunday, October 17, 1920

With Mr. Stein once again through some of Mexico City's attractions. To the Angel monastery, then to the caves, and finally to a parade. Moods of Vienna, the band played *Tannhäuser*. Beautiful horses, good, colorfully dressed riders, endless cars, populated by powdered, dark-eyed ladies. Lots of demi-monde and exhaust stench. Quite interesting to see this once. For lunch to the country house of a friend of Vogel's near the Churubusco monastery.

A charming country house surrounded by a high wall received us. We loaded our stomachs with a princely meal there, in the company of several ladies. I downed four glasses of red wine and a sherry and did not feel a thing. God knows, I am going to learn it after all. Of course the Doctor guzzled a few glasses himself. Conversation about religion, war, and Mexico. Later a walk in the garden and surroundings. A lava field. Suddenly I was hit with a toothache, wonderful, to drive to the country with this hanging over me.

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Until the Doctor's return on Sunday [November 7] I bathed my way to health and was perfectly restored by Sunday. A dance in San Andrés was very interesting. Guitar and dancing Indian women. They wanted me to dance as well, but I remained content with watching. Suddenly the musicians played the hackneyed old song "Puppchen, du bist mein Augenstern" (Dolly, you are the apple of my eye). I sang it in German, they all



Pl. 23: *Indian Boy—St Andres, Guadalajara*

perked up, and days later when I returned into the area to draw, boys raced past me singing “Puppchen.”

Sunday afternoon to the bullfight with a German I had met in the meantime. In the evening after my return from the bullfight the Doctor was back. Joy at seeing each other again. One more day in Guadalajara and on Tuesday [November 9] departure for Mexico City. Train ride quite good. In the evening I entertained the male youth at a station, they laughed and enjoyed themselves until the conductor, a stupid fellow, sent an English-speaking chap to the Doctor to forbid my talking to the boys. What an ox.

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The next day, Sunday [December 5], I took Best's girlfriend, Miss Porter, and Mrs. Habermann along to Tepotzotlán. It was a sunny, wonderful, Mexican day. Once again I soaked up everything. In the monastery, which we reached from Teoloyucan on foot, we were received in the friendliest way. The Capitan gave me a big hug. Everybody laughed—we ate in the kitchen. The two ladies literally gorged themselves.

The monastery enthused everybody, myself included. At 2 o'clock, after long goodbyes, we set out on foot to Cuautitlán. The ladies' little legs got tired. Mrs. Habermann, a tall Swede, fell back and ate suspicious amounts of sugar. I set the pace with one-two, one-two. Finally the Miss lost her pride to ask, "Can't we have a break?"—"Sure," I said. There they were beside the road, lying next to a tree, with their legs in the air so the blood could flow back.

Well, I took the two ladies to the train. Until its late arrival the topic 'woman' was debated. And the topic 'woman' revolved around modern women's emancipation, and the consequent awakening of feminine egotism. What are they gaining? Nothing! They are only distancing themselves from their most sacred ground, loosing connection with their duties and destinies. That is not happiness. A woman cannot serve two masters. She can only experience one world, and this completely. To attempt more is bound to rend her forces and develop something foreign and antagonistic to her nature. Woman must not be suppressed, but rather lovingly urged in directions in which she is mightier and nobler than we [men] can ever be. That is what's so wonderful about indigenous women. With what calm and patience they bear their lives, fulfill their duties, and bring up their children despite all their work. And look at them, no dull eyes, no migraines, no nervousness. Hard as steel, and loving life, they wink at you and radiate out inexhaustible energy. Woman must give Love, and only Love, even if through the hand of fate she might not receive it back in the same measure. What does that matter? Giving is better than receiving. Women who only take are whores, but women who give are the white gems in our dark, difficult lives. Not egotism, Love—this must become and remain humanity's new faith.



Pl. 35: *Aztec Woman and Child, Tepozotlán*



I said good-bye to my companions and went to the hotel. Changed clothes, then went to the German bazaar. Unexpectedly nice was the evening there. I danced a lot and on my last day still met truly nice people. Too late. The next day brought departure, and now farewell, you wonderful city rich in dreams—never will I forget what you gave and how you wove your past and your present around my imagination. Your valley is the most beautiful I have seen. Your surrounding mountains are the temples of your greatness. And the train carried me away. Mr. Vogel took me to the station. At 8 o'clock the train pulled out [Monday, December 6]. By night out into the country.

Pl. 36: *Tropical Fantasy*

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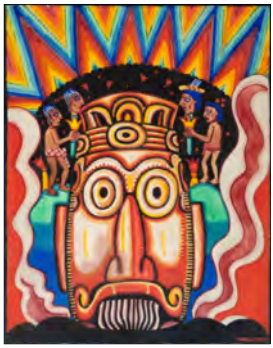
At seven in the morning [Thursday, December 9] I started the walk across the bridge. The Mexican side was amiable as I showed my German passport. The American side made me come back at one o'clock. I wandered around all morning, talked with Mexicans and made all sorts of jokes and games with children. At one o'clock strict interview, all sorts of questions, and the "admitted" to the land of freedom was stamped into my passport. With the backpack on my back I wandered into the free land. The rest of the luggage had already gone on to Laredo, Texas the day before.

The contrast can be felt already here at the border. On the American side, everything points to the superficial, materialistic-egotistic. I have never felt that so clearly. It's all about the stomach and direct indulgence in pleasure. Nothing for eye and ear, only for tongue and belly. A band was playing on the plaza. I stood there and listened because the Mexican band played very well, when I heard beside me one of those shrill voices I am so fond of, "Gee, how I like music." Yes, I am here; just then I knew that I was

back in America. I had to move on and laugh. They are like kids, these Americans. Nothing exalted, just run after the sounds of the day. If a thought enters their empty brain, they stand in awe for a while, until their mouth finds a trite "gee" or something like that. I left Laredo at nine in the evening.



Pl. 37: *Montezuma's Death*



Pl. 38: *Mexican Fantasy III*

Arrival in San Antonio at 6 o'clock the next morning [Friday, December 10]. With wide eyes I looked at the surroundings which appeared so cold and soulless, and an indescribable loneliness rose in me, so powerful that I could have screamed, screamed with disappointment and with longing for what I left behind. Instead I clenched my fists and struck out into the callous coarseness that lay before me.

And now that I am here again in America, the land of today's perhaps most extreme egotism and materialism, quite a few thoughts arise in me clearly which before had been inside me only as foreboding and longing. Contrast alone can result in deeds and works. Same here. Returning from a land that has a great, beautiful soul and has been desperately mistreated and misunderstood, I perceive America to be dauntingly dead and lifeless. Just what are the masses chasing after? Gratification of selfish desires at the expense of others. Each one has his family, and there his humanity ends, outside the home he is like the fox striving to outwit, in order to make his own nest nice and warm—at the expense of others. Wrong—this is the misery and the downfall of our race.

Socialism, ha! ha! What words—what good does that Socialism do which is preached today and even lives here and there. It is nothing but a re-valuation of old values, not for the better, just a transition into different hands. What did the war bring? What kind of enlightenment? Diplomats are still arguing over phantom wins and think they are laying a foundation stone for new values, and not one, not a single one is among them who hears humanity's cry of woe and senses the required direction. They still want force, new armies already again, what blindness! The white race has no future because it has no feeling for the human, because its sentiments are narrow and selfish. It's the children you have to bring up differently, you white kings. That's where the problem lies, not in the hatred of nations. Give the children Soul, educate them to Love and not to Selfishness. Then perhaps there is still hope for a better, rejuvenated future.

The new religion is not born on altars dedicated to the idols of a decadent Christianity. The new religion is not the kneeling in front of saints and altars. The new religion is

one's own, vast, selfless humanity, which opens the heart to the suffering of others and helps out of inner compulsion and self-generated power. Why always through Christ and through God, this dependency is just madness. Our humanity is eternal, as long as we experience the soul of nature, and in this experience alone is the godhead, and nowhere else. For sure it is a long way to this conviction—but we must seek this way, and travel it if we wish to become happy and joyful in life. Not wedge and hammer of guilt should be preached. Nobody is born guilty, we are all destined for joy and happiness. But we must find the way to this happiness, and this way—this way is only in us, in our deeds and in our ability to give our all. Christ like other so-called holy men found this path in himself, we need not adore him for this. Surely he did not want that, it would be crassest, most unintelligible egotism. He can only demand admiration, that is all—and this is what youth must be told. It has taken thirty-four years until this has become clear in me, but now it is like a hand that directs my way. We must not be weak in our faith, faith must make us proud and give us courage for life, and all who touch us must receive of this, for we do not belong to ourselves, we are born into a whole and must help the big whole, not just the small part.

No selfishness, no egotism—and from the graves of the war will arise a new and finally better world. We have the key in hand—but they all can't find the lock because they always run in the wrong direction. Die, vanity, and beget a race of great and selfless Men. The new religion is to be Man, and we ourselves are the Temple, and our deeds and the nourishment that we bring, are the happiness that streams from us.

Poor as a church mouse and half in a fever I reached New York. All I have is a big, wide heart full of beauty, which I gathered down there. All shall have of it—all—most of all those who hate and misunderstand me. I herewith close this book and put it with all the rest of my poems and writings.

Audio CD

Meine Reise durch Mexico / Mexico Diary 1920

Selections from Winold Reiss's *Mexico Diary* set to Music by
Jens Barnieck and Frank Mehring

In his ***Mexico Diary***, the German-American artist **Winold Reiss** (1886-1953) evokes images, moods and melodies from the many places he visited while in Mexico in 1920. Jens Barnieck and Frank Mehring are bringing these enthusiastic descriptions of encounters with Mexico's people, landscapes and colors to life in a newly composed audio drama based on key passages in the diary. Original compositions, electronic sounds and musical quotations* ranging from Lutheran choral music and Aztec melodies to blues and 12-tone avant-garde sounds accompany Winold Reiss's journey from New York across the Rio Grande to the heart of Mexico City.



Tracks

German Version

01) Dienstag, 5. Oktober 1920 Vorwärts nach Mexiko
02) Donnerstag, 7. Oktober 1920 – Von Städten und Grenzen
03) Freitag, 8. Oktober 1920 – Malerisches Durcheinander
04) Samstag, 9. Oktober 1920 – Viva Mexico
05) Sonntag, 10. Oktober 1920 – Erhabene Größe
06) Montag, 11. Oktober 1920 – Echtestes Mexiko
07) Donnerstag, 14. Oktober, 1920 – Der Schwarzwald in Mexiko?
08) Freitag, 15. Oktober 1920 – Kontrast
09) Samstag, 16. Oktober 1920 – Echos aus der Vergangenheit – In die Zukunft
10) Sonntag, 17. Oktober 1920 – Klöster, Paradies und neue Arbeiten
11) Samstag, 23. Oktober 1920 – In einem anderen Land
12) Sonntag, 7. November 1920 – "Puppchen"
13) Mittwoch, 17. November 1920 – Gestohlene Geschichte
14) Sonntag, 5. Dezember 1920 – Ewiges Rätsel: Frauen
15) Freitag, 10. Dezember 1920 – Wieder der Blues

English Version

16) Tuesday, October 5, 1920 – Onward to Mexico
17) Thursday, October 7, 1920 – Of Cities and Borders
18) Friday, October 8, 1920 – Picturesque Confusion
19) Saturday, October 9, 1920 – Viva Mexico
20) Sunday, October 10, 1920 – Majestic Grandeur
21) Monday, October 11, 1920 – Truest Mexico
22) Thursday, October 14, 1920 – Schwarzwald in Mexico?
23) Friday, October 15, 1920 – Contrast
24) Saturday, October 16, 1920 – Echoes from the Past—Into the Future
25) Sunday, October 17, 1920 – Monasteries, Parades and New Paintings
26) Saturday, October 23, 1920 – In Another Land
27) Sunday, November 7, 1920 – "Puppchen"
28) Wednesday, November 17, 1920 – Stolen Past
29) Sunday, December 5, 1920 – Eternal Mystery: Women
30) Friday, December 10, 1920 – Back to the Blues

Jens Barnieck, composition, piano, organ, sound tape, narration
Frank Mehring, composition, guitar, banjo, narration

Recorded on June 27 and July 9, 2015 at SWR (Südwestrundfunk)
Landesfunkhaus in Mainz, Germany
Bösendorfer Piano
Andreas Nusbaum, recording engineer

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* Musical quotations: Mexican songs; Martin Luther: "Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott"; Léon Jessel: "Schwarzwaldmädel"; Augustin Lara "Granada" and "Palabras de Mujer"; an Aztec melody; Richard Wagner: "Einzug der Gäste auf der Wartburg"; Franz Schubert: "Auf dem Wasser zu singen"; "Puppchen, du bist mein Augenstern" sung by Zita Szeleczky; Frank Mehring: "The Weary Blues"; Johann Sebastian Bach: "Präludium C-Dur", Wohltemperiertes Klavier I, BWV 846.