

MUSEO TAMAYO

Rufino Tamayo
(Oaxaca de Juárez, Oaxaca, México, 1899)
The portrait of Olga, 1964

Hello, my name is Juan Carlos Pereda, deputy director of collections at the Museo Tamayo.

Rufino Tamayo is one of the classic artists of Mexico, he was born in Oaxaca in 1899. As a poor indigenous orphan, he achieved an important international career during the first half of the 20th century. By doing so, he put Mexico on the map of modern art in the United States and Europe.

The portrait of Olga, painted in 1964, represents the painter's wife and is one of the most relevant works in the museum's collection, which the artist donated to Mexico.

The importance of this artwork lies in the fact that, even though it meets with the conditions that must be met in the art of portraits within art history, such as documenting an existence, being a testimony of a physical identity and certain psychological traits, it also brings together many of the qualities that Tamayo had conquered in his painting, such as the synthesis of the image and a contrasting color. In this piece he also included a hallmark, the watermelon that completes the composition.

The monumental format of the painting says a lot about what the artist wanted to express: to acknowledge the presence of his wife as an inspiration and a promoter of his work and as someone affectively important. Olga and Rufino were married for more than sixty years and between them there was an exemplary collaboration, Tamayo found in Olga his complement of life and work. This portrait is an eloquent testimony of that union and collaboration, it is the greatest of more than 20 portraits that are known of her, created by the painter, since they met in 1934.

In this portrait, Olga appears seated majestically, covered in a chrome-yellow cloak, which contrasts vividly with the red dress she is wearing. Her face is serene and she is combed with her characteristic hair bun, tied on top of her head, her hands complete the serenity of her face, together they rest on Mrs. Tamayo's lap. The painter wanted to resemble his wife with pre-Hispanic ceramics and gave her the color of clay, he put a circle on her visible cheek, a sign of dignity and hierarchy in pre-Hispanic cultures, to give her a timeless character, the eyes of the portrayed woman do not have pupils, as if it were a classical sculpture.

For the viewer, this portrait of Olga proposes a contemplation of the feminine, which includes a certain power and an elusive feeling of maternal tenderness. It is interesting to appreciate the way in which Tamayo aesthetically viewed and expressed his emotions towards her.

The Portrait of Olga, as a whole, involves, in addition to the aesthetic achievements, an anticipated sense of gender, in which the artist transforms his wife, both as a cultural monument and as a reason for affection.

With this I say goodbye, inviting you to visit the Commented Collection's section to find more content on the artworks that make up the Museo Tamayo's collection.

Text by Lorenza Herrasti and
Diana Ortega