

BACK TO THE FUTURE

MFAH launches world's most comprehensive digital archive of Latin American and Latino art

By [Tyler Rudick](#)

01.18.12 | 03:14 pm

After a decade of culling historical material from across North and South America, the [Museum of Fine Arts, Houston](#) and its research institute, [International Center for the Arts of the Americas \(ICAA\)](#), will launch its long-awaited digital archive of Latin American and Latino art on Thursday.

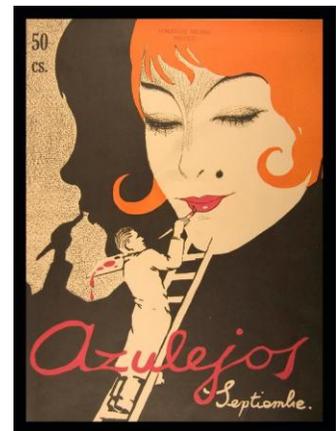
The centerpiece of a \$50 million initiative that began in 2001 to expand the museum's 20th-century Latin American art, the new online collection offers an array of primary-source material — including artists' writings and correspondence as well as other textual material from period journals and newspapers — all brought together for the first time in a free searchable database.

"Primary documents like this are fundamental to the history of art," ICAA director Mari Carmen Ramírez said.

"The project is about access to documents, rather than the collecting of physical objects," ICAA director Mari Carmen Ramírez told CultureMap in a recent phone interview. "The material never leaves the institutions or countries that have shared them with the archive."

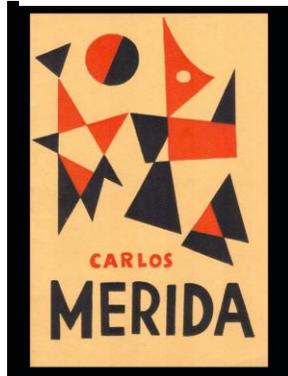
The study of Latin American art has been plagued by a lack of scholarly infrastructure, she said. Throughout the Americas, uncataloged materials remain sequestered in universities, museums and private collections throughout the Americas without a means to find them.

"Primary documents like this are fundamental to the history of art," Ramírez explained. "Until now, though, they haven't been available in any comprehensive format. We hope this project opens new avenues of scholarship."



Cover for the journal *Azulejos* (Mexico City), Vol. I, No. 2 (September, 1921), colección de Instituto de Investigaciones Bibliográficas: Biblioteca Nacional/Hemeroteca Nacional, Mexico City

Documents of 20th-Century Latin American and Latino Art, as the [online archive](#) is known officially, begins with a look at 2,500 documents from Argentina and Mexico as well as the American Midwest. The Midwest is an area rich in groundbreaking Chicano art, yet, like many regions of the United States, it's often not included in broader studies of Latin American art.



Cover for Carlos Mérida's exhibition, *La Pintura en su estado actual*, held at Mexico City's Galería de Arte Mexicano, 1953

"Artists from the U.S. are typically not appreciated as part of this history of Latin American art," said Victor Sorell, one of the key American consultants for archive and director of the Institute for Latino Studies at the University of Notre Dame. "It's wonderful to see so many neglected arenas of visual arts finally commanding attention."

To accompany the online archive, the MFAH and Yale University Press will publish a series of 13 books throughout the next decade featuring selections from the digital collection, many of which will be published for the first time in English. The first volume, [Resisting Categories: Latin American and/or Latino?](#) will be available in the coming weeks.

"The project offers one of the first fully continental looks at Latin American art," said Tomás Ybarra-Frausto, a noted Chicano art historian and editor of the forthcoming *Resisting Categories* book. "At last US Latino American voices will be incorporated into the dialogue."

"This certainly will change the larger art historical record as a whole, offering a new map to modernity," he noted. "The archive presents a complex multi-centric perspective on modern art.

"Not just New York, Paris, and Los Angeles, but other centers like Chicago and Lima as well."

Starting Thursday, the MFAH will host a free two-day [symposium](#) to mark the new archive. [Click here](#) for details.

<http://houston.culturemap.com/newsdetail/01-18-12-mfahs-online-archive-launches-the-new-face-of-art-history-with-latin-american-and-latino-art/>