

MEXICO ACCORDING TO... MIHO HAGINO

BY LEANDRA FORT

Born in Japan, Miho Hagino has been living and working in Mexico City since 1996. Her work explores the human being and the subject within the mass, focusing on the “alienated individual”. She is a multidisciplinary artist and is cofounder of Fundación Paisaje Social.

—What was it that appealed to you most about the country when you decided to take up residence in Mexico?

When I first came to Mexico in 1993, I felt that an invisible energy was at work. Japan at that time was fully developed, and I couldn't find my potential there. I intuitively felt that there might be something that I could do in a country like Mexico.

—What struck you most about Mexican culture?

Since I came from a world that was bound by time and money, I was surprised by the diversity of values held by Mexicans. Amid such diversity, it was difficult for me to study and understand my own background, and to create my own values.

—Do you see any similarities between Japanese and Mexican culture?

A refined sense. Glimpses of thoughtful consideration within words and actions.

—If you could introduce a Mexican trait to Japanese culture, what would it be and why?

Flexibility, agility, and creativity. Endurance is a characteristic of Japanese culture, but I believe these other values present in Mexican culture are necessary when it comes to make a drastic social change.

—What can Mexicans learn from Japanese culture?

Persistence and sincerity.

—Working in Mexico... A challenge or an opportunity? Why?

I think it is an opportunity. Along with my own creative activities, I am a member of the non-profit organization Fundación Paisaje Social.

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We hold art workshops in communities, and with our activities we strengthen the connections between people. We act with the conviction that, under Mexican human rights law, the day will come when the people who we attend –people who are excluded from society– will be able to regularly experience cultural activities. In Mexico, there is much potential for such initiatives.

–How do you describe your life in Mexico to your acquaintances in Japan?

I tell them that life in Mexico is full of joy. It is an invigorating place with a lot of flexibility, where, with the help of its honest people, there is great potential to turn your dreams into reality.

–What's your favorite place to relax in Mexico?

Gazing at the open sky from my own rooftop is supremely relaxing. I also often go running or cycling in Chapultepec Park.

–What is your favorite Mexican beach?

I love the island beach at Altata in Sinaloa. The place is untouched by human hands. There's not even a single *palapa* in sight.

–And your favorite town in Mexico?

Juchitán in Oaxaca. The town so full of magic it is impossible to put into words.

–In your opinion, what is the most inspirational place in Mexico?

I remember a journey walking from the town of Ameca in Jalisco to the holy place of Talpa. It was a pilgrimage, but what I remember best are the experiences and scenery along the way while walking for three straight days. I would also say the village of Acacoyagua in Chiapas. It is the first place where Japanese immigrants arrived in Mexico. I will never forget my experiences in those two places.

–What is your favorite building in Mexico?

I have a deep affection for the building where the Japanese Embassy used to be on Paseo de la Reforma in Mexico City, co-designed by Mexico's Pedro Ramirez Vazquez and Japan's Kenzo Tange. Hearing the news that it will soon be demolished truly saddened me. I would much prefer they renovate it while preserving its facade.

–Somewhere everyone should visit when in Mexico?

The archaeological site of Teotihuacan. Everyone who travels to Mexico should make time to visit not only the enormous pyramids, but also check out the fresco museum, the grotto-style restaurants on the outskirts of the site, and stroll around the ruins in the nearby village.

–What is your favorite Mexican dish?

It is nearly impossible to choose just one, but my favorites are *chiles en nogada* and *mole*. Recently I have been really impressed by a variety of bar snacks and dishes in the Yucatán Peninsula that I had never seen before. In particular, I was totally amazed with a dish called *sikil pak* I ate in Campeche, which is made from a kind of pumpkin and served as a paste.

–And your favorite restaurant in Mexico?

My favorite is El Molino, in Puebla. I could easily spend all day there.

–Mexican artists you admire?

I love the work of modern and contemporary Mexican artists and photographers with intimate connections to communities. There are many young Mexican artists volunteering with the Paisaje Social for whom I have great respect.

–Tell us about a memorable exhibition you have had in Mexico.

In 2005, I showed at Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros, in Mexico City, in an exhibition called *Blue Piano*. That experience completely changed my own conception of contemporary art. Since then, I have more sincerely explored my own personal background, the fact that I am a Japanese immigrant living in Mexico, and how I should go about transmitting the potential passed down to me from previous generations, through my art.

–Name a venue in Mexico where you would love to exhibit at.

Last year I discovered a small building in a corner of Viveros de Coyoacán, in Mexico City. It might be the smallest gallery I have ever seen in Mexico, but I am really curious about it.

–What do you miss most about Mexico when you're gone?

The open-mindedness of its people, and the way they value family and friends down to their very core.

–What do you usually give people as a souvenir of Mexico?

Glassware, coffee, vanilla beans and spices, Monica Patiño seasonings and jarred food.

–What do you like most about Mexico?

The free-thinking mindset and creativity of the Mexicans.

–Your favorite Japanese restaurant in Mexico is...

Restaurant Taro, a traditional Japanese restaurant in Miguel Ángel de Quevedo, in Mexico City.