

Covarrubias, M. (2022).  
*Corrientes del Pacífico*  
Colección Antítesis 15  
Prefacio de Abraham Cruzvillegas.  
México: Alias Editorial  
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Relatively unknown to new generations of geographers and historians, Mexican illustrator Miguel Covarrubias (1904-1957) has received more attention in recent years. An excellent example is Mónica Ramírez Bernal's *El océano como paisaje* (Mexico, UNAM, 2018) which recovers the work of Covarrubias and, in particular, links for the first time the ideas of John Brian Harley (1932-1991) to Covarrubias's maps; opens up art history's relationships with these maps; and analyzes the map series in an overview of the Pacific.

Even so, the maps themselves were rarely, if at all, available at a reasonable size that would allow researchers to enjoy these colorful maps and detect the new meanings of the Pacific that Covarrubias offers us. In a risky and unusual investment of two thousand printed copies, the young and independent publisher Alias, from Mexico City, presents the set of Covarrubias's six maps, on sheets of 94 x 58 centimeters each, folded and arranged in a cardboard box, accompanied by a brochure divided into two parts.

The first part of the brochure is an essay by the conceptual artist Abraham Cruzvillegas which situates Covarrubias in 1923 when, as a young man, he entered the publishing business in Manhattan, working as an illustrator for *Vanity Fair*, *The New Yorker*, *Vogue* and *Fortune*. That editorial space opened new doors to Covarrubias, including for the development of the "Golden

Gate International Exposition" project, timed to intersect with the opening of two major San Francisco bridges: the Golden Gate and the Bay Bridge.. Covarrubias arrived in San Francisco with his wife, Rosa Rolando (1895-1970), in August 1938 to finish a series of large-format maps. The wall maps occupied a leading place in the Pacific House, a building designed to convey, on its very walls, the new possibilities of re-discovering the Pacific. Open between February and November 1939, the exposition sought to inform the United States's west coast public about the marine world, the countries, the landscapes, the economies, and the cultures of the Pacific.

The second part of the brochure is a translation, from English to Spanish (by Carmen Plascencia), of the essay by Covarrubias which accompanied the exhibition and which provides detailed descriptions of the variables and colors that Covarrubias considered for each map. He explains that the exposition organizers accepted the recommendation of Carl Sauer (1889-1975), of Berkeley's Department of Geography, regarding the use of Alphons J. van der Grinten's projection (1852-1921), and they removed the continents of Europe and Africa from the base map, in order to focus attention on the Pacific and escape from a Eurocentric perspective. The series of six wall maps begins with the peoples that surround the Pacific Rim and continues with the themes of flora and fauna, art forms, the economy, native dwellings, and means of transportation.

In these maps by Covarrubias there is a historical density, and they open up to the viewer the multiple interactions that constituted the Pacific. They occupy a key place for approaches that seek to broaden the vision towards other ways of thinking about space within conceptual

frameworks such as mobility or ties. These maps offer new units of study and act as starting points for connections and exchanges; they are, in that sense, an incentive to discover the marine world of the Pacific and to understand and visualize the connection between distant geographies of peoples and earth products (agriculture, mining, livestock), which connect micro-scales of analysis and global dynamics under the impulse of new transport by sea and air.

Covarrubias's maps constituted a new reading of the vast space of the Pacific and of its past and

present. They served in part to highlight the interaction of San Francisco, California, as a port, with other Pacific regions; function as a visual pedagogy for teaching the interconnections of remote places between America and Asia; and are part of the global project of the United States and its interests in the Pacific, just before the start of World War II.

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