

Talent, discipline, and inspiration clearly came together for Meza in his first year of art school. On the basis of his work that year, he was awarded a scholarship for the following three years of study. Photographer Carlos Jurado and lithographer Per Anderson encouraged and guided him in his college years as his work matured. No longer the directionless youth of seventeen, Meza spent his vacations in the mountains of Chiapas and Oaxaca drawing and making photographs of the things that he beheld.

Meza describes himself as an “alternative photographer”, and that phrase captures precisely the spirit of the late 1960s and early 1970s that has never ceased to influence his work. The period was an expansive “search for alternatives” as described by social critic Paul Goodman in his *Communitas: Means of Livelihood and Ways of Life*. Meza has kept that search alive since he created those early colorful, psychedelic drawings of his year of wandering.

In his second year at the School of Fine Arts at the Universidad Veracruzana, he began his serious work with Carlos Jurado, beginning to experiment with “photomechanism”, mixing photographic images with paint. “I wanted to be an experimental photographer”, says Meza, “and my desire was to manipulate reality.”

By 1979, Meza was a member of the Institute of Fine Arts at UV and his experimental photographic techniques were further developed. His first important work was in gum bichromate, a photomechanical process which uses a bichromated colloid which hardens when exposed to light. Scottsman Mungo Ponton had first discovered the process in 1839. The time-honored process of making albumen prints was also added to Meza’s technical inventory. This process dates back to the 19th century. As well, Meza began to fabricate his own “pin hole” cameras in order to master the most basic of photographic techniques and to rediscover for himself the evolution of photography from its most primitive beginnings.

However, he also worked with newer techniques such as the internal dye diffusion transfer print, commonly known as the Polaroid print. One can only imagine Meza watching a Polaroid print “develop” before his eyes, recreating the same magic that captivated him when as a child he first watched his aunt create a pencil drawing.

The palette of Meza’s photographic techniques has continued to expand in recent years.

In the early 1990s he began to make palladium prints. A process dating back into the early 20th century, palladium prints are noted for the stability of the image. In 1996 Meza returned again to “pure photography”, working in both color and black and white.

The following year, in the autumn of 1997, the artist returned to his roots in the northern border country of Mexico to see his family in the town of Rio Bravo on the Rio Bravo del Norte. From this trip came the inspiration for his work in this volume. During his years in Xalapa, the family farm where he had spent his formative years had been sold because the price of cotton had collapsed.

The small farms and ranches of his childhood had been acquired by large mechanized agricultural companies, and much of the rural population had left. The desolation of many rural areas rapidly followed. When Meza returned to the old family ranch he saw only mounds of shrubs and one old tree. The house and all the surrounding buildings were gone. The same thing had happened to nearby ranches, and all he found were empty and decaying houses and the rusted ruins of the agricultural equipment used on those small farms in the borderland south of the Rio Bravo.

His memory of the life on those small family holdings was all that he now had. The details of his youth were gone and all he possessed was the landscape of desolation in the midst of vast areas irrigated and sown by the remote corporations. Photographing and recording this landscape of deterioration