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Mexico: The Revolution and Beyond. Photographs by Agustín Víctor Casasola 1900-1940. Essay by Pete Hamill. Pablo Ortiz Monasterio, Ed. NY: Aperture, 2003. 220 pp. ISBN: 1-931788-22-7. US\$50.00

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Intended as an introduction to the work of Agustín Víctor Casasola for those “beyond the frontiers of his native Mexico”, Aperture’s *Mexico: The Revolution and Beyond* fascinates, inspires and enlightens all who see it regardless of their disciplinary specialization or interests. The 155 stunning black and white photographs that compose this book--all from the Casasola archive and dating from 1900 to 1940--document Mexico’s transition from peace to revolution as well as its transformation from a rural peasant society to a fully modern one, and are a testament to Casasola’s singular vision in creating one of the world’s first professional photographic agencies.

The book begins with a foreword by Sergio Raúl Arroyo, General Director of Mexico’s National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) in which he relates how the Fototeca Nacional, the country’s first national photographic library, came into being in 1976 in order to prevent the sale of the Casasola archive--already considered by then a national treasure--to an entity in the United States (11).

Next, in an eloquent introductory essay, Pete Hamill brilliantly condenses the historical, political, economic and social events, conditions, and backdrop of Casasola’s Mexico, placing him firmly in his milieu and tracing not only Casasola’s own development and growth as a photographer and entrepreneur, but also that of the emerging field of photojournalism. Hamill presents Casasola as one of the giants of twentieth-century photography but one who is, incredibly, barely known outside of Mexico. Now, thanks to the research underway to catalog the Casasola Archive for the Fototeca Nacional of INAH, “his life and work are coming into sharper focus”(13). Hamill goes on to examine many of the photos in the book as historical, artistic and human documents noting, in the end, that

in his own marvelous photography, and in the work of others that he assembled in the Archive, [Casasola] created a collective work of art that seems today even more powerful than when it was being made. Enter that world, and you are touched by pathos, ambition, courage, laughter, tragedy, absurdity, and some abiding mysteries. Few artists anywhere have ever accomplished so much. (21)

Following Hamill’s essay are eight chapters of captivating photographs, loosely following Casasola’s own categories for his collection: The Porfirian Peace, The Revolutionary War, Trades, Modernity, The Eagle and the Serpent, The Night, Halls of Justice, and Famous People. The photographs, taken with what we would consider primitive equipment today, are a testament to Casasola’s good eye as photographer and collector. Whether depicting posed portraits or mass scenes of the revolution and changing times, the photographs are oriented so as to capture the reality of the situation and give an inkling as to what was going to happen. Our attention is held by the social awareness revealed in the photographers’ instinct for positioning themselves back far enough to capture the whole scene--we want to know more about these people and what was going on. Even the posed photographs leave us with the sense that we are interrupting something in progress. As Sergio Raúl Arroyo and Rosa Casanova state in the final essay of the book, through all these photographs we can see Casasola’s “clear perception of the historic sense of his profession,” and his “all-encompassing view, which was translated into a clear sense of order in his compositions.” (210)

This book, with its unforgettable photographs that add a human dimension to historical events, is a fitting tribute to the work of a great Mexican visionary documentary photographer: It inspires, enlightens and brings his era to life. Aperture has brilliantly achieved its goal of bringing Casasola, his work and his legacy to the attention of the general public in the English speaking world. It will interest photographers, historians, sociologists and Latinamericanists and can serve as a potent, visually captivating ancillary to professors of history, humanities, social sciences, Latin American history and culture, and photography or what might be called photoethnography. No college or university library can afford to miss this book, and, indeed, anyone seriously interested in Mexican history and culture should not be without this remarkable book.

