

**Gabriel Figueroa Flores** is the son of the influential cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa who worked with Diego Rivera. Today he works with Diego Lopez Rivera, the grandson of Diego Rivera on a film, *A Portrait of Diego Rivera* that was directed by Rivera, produced by Figueroa, and photographed by Manuel Alvarez Bravo. Figueroa Jr. is a prominent photographer in Mexico City. On January 17<sup>th</sup> I visited him and Diego Lopez, in the Churubusco Studios in Coyoacan, to learn more about their collaboration and interview them about, *Man at the Crossroads*.

Interview Questions for Gabriel Figueroa Flores, Son of Mexican Cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa January 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007, Churubusco Studios, Rio Escondido, Coyoacan, Mexico D.F

My name is Gabriel Figueroa Flores and I am the son of cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa.

**BMW: What was your father's relationship with Diego Rivera? He was known as the Fourth Mexican muralist, after Rivera, Siqueros and Orozco. Why was he known as the fourth and what do you think of this?**

**GF:** When my father knew Diego Rivera they lived in the same place the street was called mescalco and the number was 12 and my father had a small quarter there and Diego Rivera was there. My father being a still photographer, he offered some of his services photographing paintings or sculptures and that's the way they met. They became good friends Diego Rivera was charming and very intelligent and my father was starting his artistic career and well I think Diego Rivera was already becoming a great personality so that's how they met. Diego Rivera was very interested in Cinema and that's why they got together on several occasions. Diego Rivera used to say that my father was a muralist that his films were like moving muralism and they have the ability to travel and that's why they were more powerful than the ones that were on the walls standing.

**BMW: Your Fathers films referenced European aesthetic traditions like German expressionism and yet they equally represent the spirit of Mexico. How did your father see his role in representing and defining the aesthetic culture of Mexico?**

**GF:** I would add to this notion that his work was more related to European cinematography than artistic movements in cinema because he was a good friend of Gregg Toland and Gregg Toland was an American who did the cinematography for Citizen Kane and Gregg Toland was his mentor so I think my father made a sort of a unique style that was a sort of a cross breed between what Toland gave him and the European expressionism and the German expressionism to become a sort of a personal style and I think that style got stronger because as any cinematographer would know you have to create the visual condition so that the story is told, and that's what my father did. And if the stories were about the revolution or about social problems obviously he did a very good job in recreating the environment, the ambience where the story took place. He was politically concerned obviously but his views on his work affecting socially were not that clear at least from what I heard he was talking about. He was at the service of a story and he tried to portray that story the best he could. Obviously he had a choice. Instead of doing comedies or doing cheap melodrama's he decided to take his work into dramatic and more important scripts, stories you know but he did, "The Pearl", that was a John Steinbeck script, a novel, and he did the fugitive, that was a Graham Green story with John Ford, so those stories were the ones that he was seeking to express himself through his cinematography and that's what was really important, not so much a political point of view, or a social point of view.

**BMW: How do you see your current collaboration with Diego Lopez Rivera as a continuation of the relationship of your father and Diego?**

**GF:** I think what united us nowadays was the fact that we have the consciousness of inheriting, we inherited and not only blood line but we inherited things, you know this documentary we are doing is something that my father produced, Manuel Alvarez Bravo photographed, and Diego Rivera acted and directed and it was in my archives that my father gave me so this is what unites us Diego and me, that we are taking a historical consciousness and of where we come from and I think that's a very strong bond.

**BMW.** In his description of his mural man at the crossroads, Rivera explained that the television and the moving image have the ability to unite and activate humans with power and intelligence. Like your father his work sought to activate and inspire a new social movement. How did your father envision his work affecting the social order in Mexico?

**GF:** When Rivera said that he was already into the nationalistic movement way in it and that means that it was a movement where a lot of intellectuals and artists participating among them, obviously my father, who came perhaps a little later, because, cinema developed a little later than the actual murals and therefore it found a good way of expressing certain archetypes of Mexican culture or Mexican art through films. I think that's the way cinema inspired in this nationalistic movement.

**BMW: The mural depicts man with access to information that can lead to knowledge and a brighter future. Well before the Internet Rivera, envisioned this mural to propose greater and easier access to information resulting in knowledge. What does this mean for the poor uneducated children of Mexico, the young generation of developing countries today?**

**GF:** Its very difficult to for any visual artist to represent what human consciousness means or caring for the other or compassion for the other and maybe it was more appropriate at that time when scientists and all these new technologies, communication technologies were discovered and developed to portray that as a hope for human kind to become a better human kind. But I think that doesn't apply because we are full of technologies, full of information nowadays and I don't see that people care enough about other people and that is what is not developing at this point. You can have good intentions but, I don't think, if you don't have really the commitment to care about the other and for the well being of other human beings, technology or not, you are not going to go anywhere and I don't think that is happening nowadays. We are not caring enough for others and that's why the world is what it is. It's divided in two, the privileged ones and the ones that have nothing.

When a nation becomes so powerful as the United States are at the moment. The real concern is not about others, the real concern is about themselves and how they can acquire more power. I think, to me, its really stupid how the most powerful nation in the world cannot make a migrant treaty with his neighbor. I find that ridiculous. They have to build a, billions and billions of dollars wall to prevent others coming in, which is, in my opinion pedestrian, instead of doing something more intelligent. Work with others is more intelligent than preventing others to having knowledge, or access or privileges or whatever and I don't see that happening between the United States and Mexico.

In Mexico, obviously, we have not created the conditions for the Mexican's not to go abroad. We don't have a strong internal market or internal works that would prevent us from going to seek better opportunities in other parts of the world. I see it more as a social problem than a technological problem and that's where I don't think there is a possible understanding, especially the way we see things, the Americans have a very puritan, very in a certain way, straightforward way of seeing laws, behaviors, but their ethics don't match the way they behave.

**BMW: Do you have any additional comments or anecdotes that you wish to share?**

Siqueiros had a more optical point of view and for Siqueiros, photography was an instrument to produce his murals. The for shortenings, for example was one, and my father used the foreshortenings in certain scenes in his movies and those are the kind of things, the romantic lighting of Orozco was used in some of my fathers images. For instance when Siqueiros had an exhibit and my father went to the opening of that exhibit Siqueiros used to welcome him saying, "You came to see what I stole from you?" and my father replied no, "I came to see what I could steal from you for my next picture". So that was a good relationship they had together. My father helped Siqueiros when he was in jail, in the sense of talking to the Mexican President who was my father's cousin at the time, to see how they could solve the political problem of having Siqueiros in jail. With Orozco it was another relationship. Orozco was a more austere and secluded man but my father confessed that he used one of his aquarelles and almost reproduced it exactly in one of his films, Flore Silvestre in 1943. And they were sitting together in the theatre and the scene came along, and Orozco jumped from his seat and my father said,

“I’m an honest thief, this is from one of your aquarelles.” And Orozco replied, “Yes but you have to show me how you acquire this volume and texture of tones, which I did not get in my aquarelle. So that’s more or less how they interacted together. By sharing points of view and by sharing different ways of seeing.