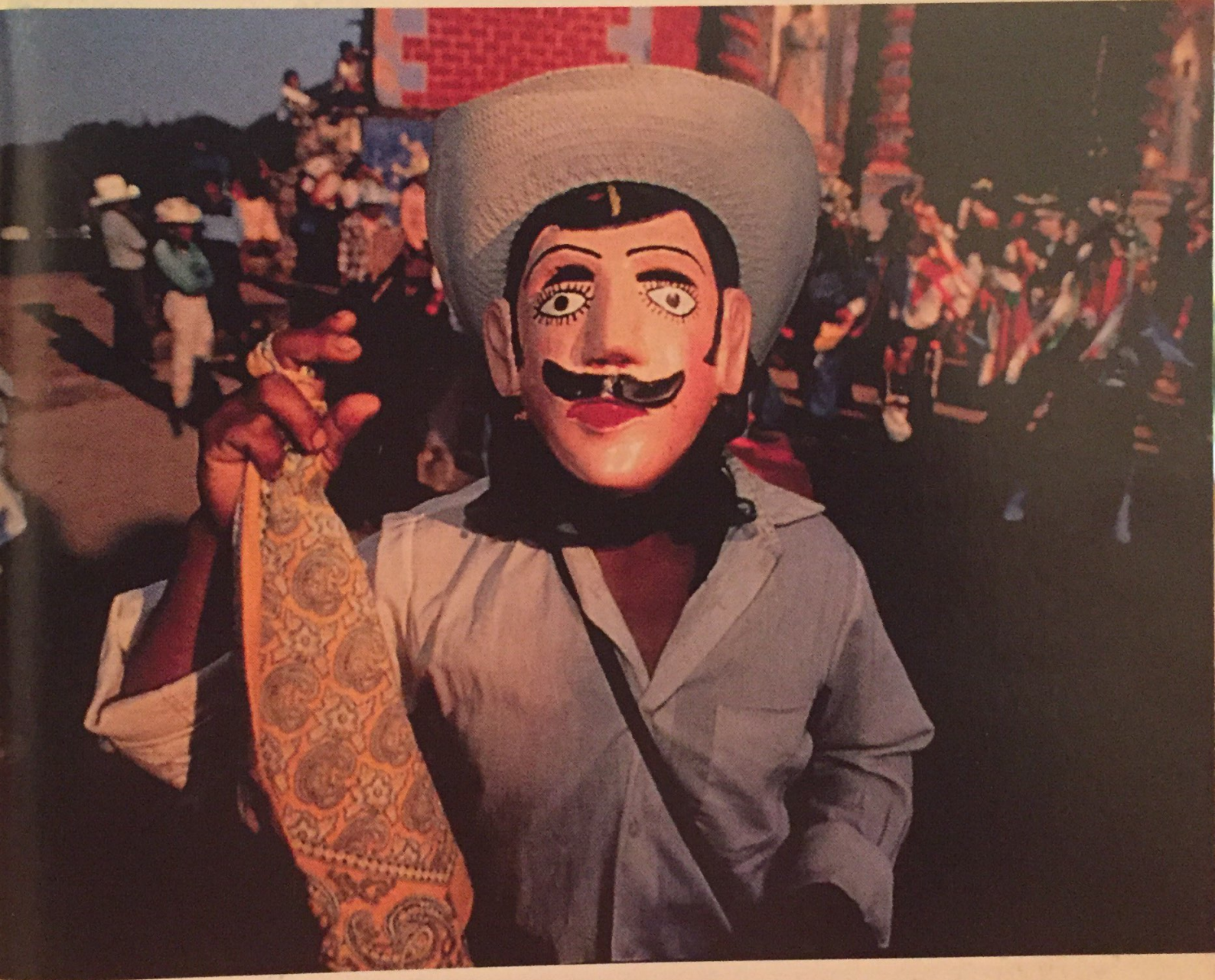


# Contact: Christians and Moors

Image and Ritual in Mexico



Photographs by George O. Jackson

# CONTACT: CHRISTIANS AND MOORS

Image and Ritual in Mexico

PHOTOGRAPHS BY GEORGE O. JACKSON

Curated by Roberto Tejada

December 3, 1999 through January 21, 2000

Exhibition and catalog sponsored in their entirety by the  
Robert J Kleberg Jr. and Helen C. Kleberg Foundation,  
San Antonio, Texas

# INTRODUCTION

The exhibition and catalog, *Contact - Christians & Moors*, are presented at Blue Star Art Space through the generous support of the Mr. Robert J. Kleberg, Jr. and Ms. Helen C. Kleberg Foundation of San Antonio, Texas. The Board of Directors and I would like to express our gratitude for the foundation's commitment to continually provide a forum for the role of contemporary art in our diverse communities. Additionally, we appreciate the foundation's support of Blue Star's international exchange programs. Our extended thankfulness to the photographer-artist, George O. Jackson, for his enthusiasm in accepting to share the *Essence of Mexico Project*, his archive of more than ten thousand images, located at the University of Texas, Austin; and to Cina Forgason's vital participation in the overall thematic processes that brought us to select *Christians & Moors*. Our sincere gratitude further goes to Roberto Tejada, curator of *Contact - Christians & Moors*. His intelligent and critical considerations of contemporary photography greatly contributed to the realization of this exhibition and catalog.

*Contact - Christians & Moors* also concurs with Blue Star's mission to broaden San Antonio's local contemporary art experience by nurturing and participating in a regional, national and international cultural exchange. As such, the exhibition of photography by Jackson, who was born in Houston, Texas, and is of Mexican-American descent, is Blue Star's fourth international cultural exchange since 1997. Jackson's photography focuses our lens on the marginal cultural legacies of the Mexican interior, those of the repeatedly exploited indigenous groups whose voices never seem to be adequately or truthfully represented.

Photography, while promising us the illusion of reality, has come to be the ideal imposter of the many realities as well as illusions of our social and cultural network. Mexico, as seen through foreign eyes, has over the centuries brought many artists and cultural travelers to explore its mesmerizing and abundant mestizo syncretism, establishing a lineage ranging from 18th century Alexander von Humboldt, Desiré Charnay, Carl Lumholz, C.B. Waite, to 20th century Edward Weston, Tina Modotti, Marilyn Bridges, all the way to George O. Jackson's recent work.

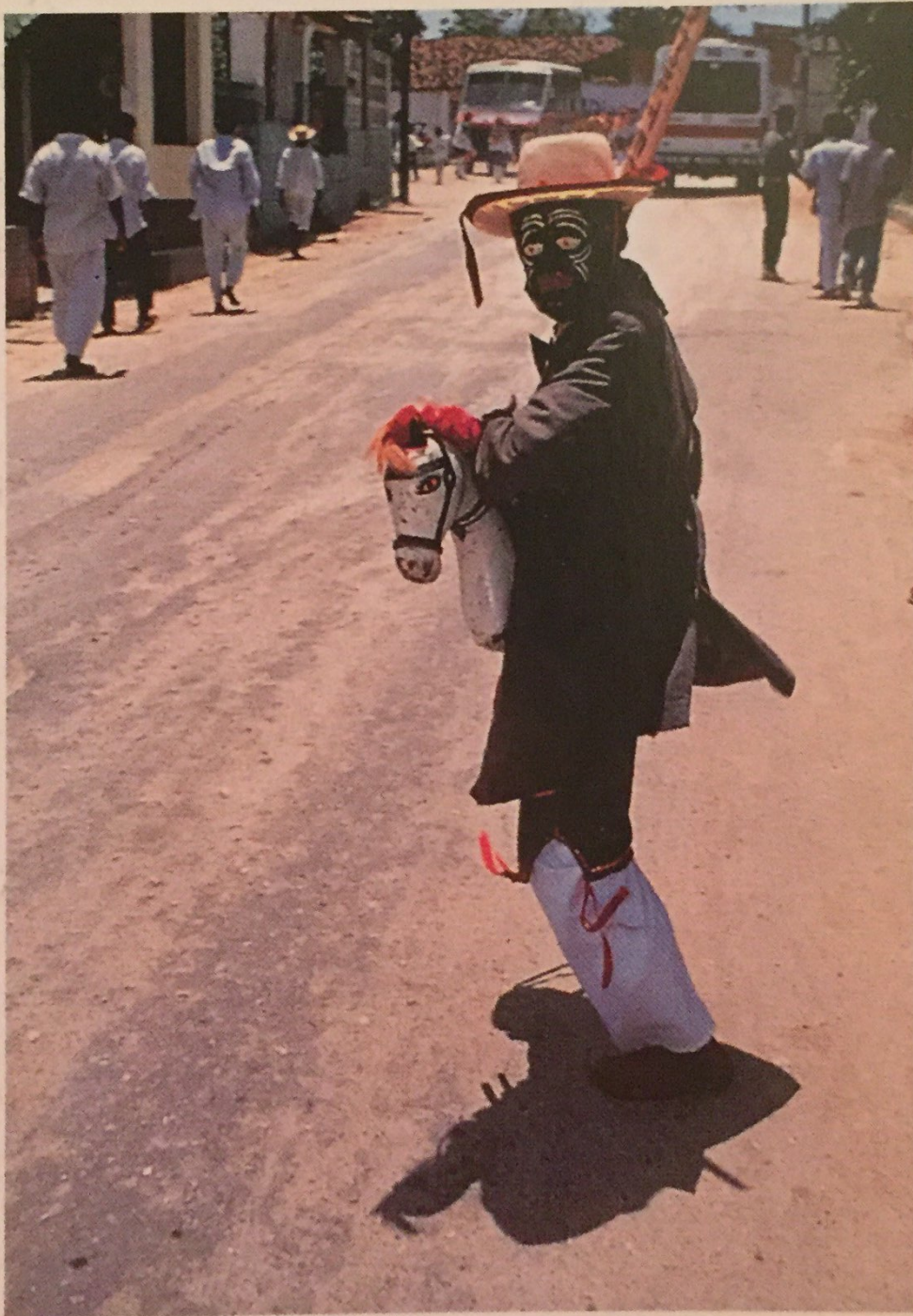
While most contemporary photographers preference Mexico's urban and social context and rarely risk to go beyond, Jackson's lens is inextricably tied to the indigenous, choosing the tough and dangerous terrain. Notwithstanding this distinctive element, today's critical perspective regards these traveling artists, by venturing into other cultures, and aside from their visual contributions, as underscoring the processes that continue to shape a so-called "Mexican National Image." Most importantly, in these critical viewpoints is the affirmation and commonality of shared cultural and ethnic differences, by which models for individual and group empowerment are constructed. The quest for recognition and its dialectic have also meant a required territorializing of identities (ethnic and otherwise) and, in order to clearly outline *who* is speaking and *which differences* are being valorized, new marginal limits are once again established on top of existing ones. In other words, any existential question of a given "authenticity" is rooted in a well-known interplay of determinism: *who* may speak and *who* will be recognized. Any photograph that addresses the indigenous necessarily speaks to these issues as well.

Nevertheless, in viewing the ninety-two selected images, Jackson's work indicates a refusal to assume an authorial voice, rather letting the information speak for itself. The '*who* may speak' is paradoxically

handed over to the viewer, and it is the audience who is asked to recognize. Jackson's documentary registry is one that provides clear evidence, reflecting the photographer's decision to place his camera straightforward and in the midst of the multiple festival and ritual aspects in question. In this transaction, Jackson also challenges Mexico's long and extensively documented photojournalist tradition with its authorized models of what constitutes "Mexican photography." With a uniquely persistent journalist's eye, coupled by a keen knowledge of the multiple representations of the indigenous—as well as the perceptive inclusion of 'as much information as possible'—Jackson stimulates and provokes the viewer's intervention. This generous and selfless strategy is what, beyond the sheer visual beauty of the subject matter, Jackson ultimately offers in *Contact - Christians and Moors*.

Carla Stellweg

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**art space**

116 Blue Star

San Antonio, Texas 78204

Tel: (210) 227-6960 • Fax: (210) 229-9412

Email: [Bluestar@onr.com](mailto:Bluestar@onr.com) • [www.bluestar-art.org](http://www.bluestar-art.org)