



The Right Livelihood Award

for outstanding vision and work on behalf of our planet and its people

Francisco Toledo (Mexico)

Honorary Award (2005)



"... for devoting himself and his art to the protection and enhancement of the heritage, environment and community life of his native Oaxaca."

Francisco Toledo

Francisco Toledo, a Zapotec, was born on July 17th, 1940 in the Oaxaca region of Mexico. He studied at the Escuela de Bellas Artes de Oaxaca and the Centro Superior de Artes Aplicadas del Instituto de Bellas Artes, Mexico. In 1960 he moved to Paris from where he travelled through Europe. In 1965 when he returned to Mexico he started to promote and protect the arts and crafts in Oaxaca.

Toledo's art is imbued with his Mexican heritage of history and mythology. He has exhibited in many galleries in Mexico, Europe, South and North America and Asia. He is represented in public and private collections worldwide. According to one commentator (Christian Viveros-Faune): "Toledo's work is a seamless meshing of global and local culture and high art. Dream images from his childhood are fused with pre-Colombian symbolism and myriad references to the work of Dubuffet, Miro, Tapies, Klee, Tamayo, Blake, Goya, Ensor and Dürer, among other artists, and also to the writing of figures like Kafka and Borges. Snakes and turtles abound, as do rabbits and coyotes, bats and toads, crickets and dogs, as well as human figures from Mexican history, cycling from one work to another in a dizzying bestiary that is part ancient codex, part intensely modern graffiti. Toledo's work is based in part on the largely misunderstood shamanistic notion of the nagual, the belief that each human's fate is intertwined with that of an Aztec spirit in animal form."

For more than twenty years Toledo has been concerned with the well-being of the Oaxacan community and has devoted much of his wealth to this purpose. He is an untiring promoter, sponsor and disseminator of the cultural values of his native state, turning its main town into a dynamic centre for the visual arts and literature. He has created children's libraries in Indian communities, and has founded a number of important artistic and cultural institutions: the Museo de Arte Contemporaneo de Oaxaca, the Graphic Arts Institute of Oaxaca (which holds some 100,000 books on art and architecture), the Jorge Luis Borges Library for the Blind (which Toledo created after watching a group of blind people visit a nearby art museum), the Centro Fotografico Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Ediciones Toledo (a printing house, which most recently published translations of the poets John Ashbery and Seamus Heaney), and the Centro Cultural Santo Domingo (botanical garden, art restoration centre and library).

In 1993 Toledo was instrumental in founding Pro-OAX (the Endorsement for the Defense and Conservation of the Cultural and National Heritage of Oaxaca) dedicated to the protection and promotion of art, culture and the built and natural environment of Oaxaca. Through Pro-OAX Toledo has led efforts to protect the architectural and cultural heritage of Oaxaca's city centre. By turning his

own private aesthetic activism into a groundswell of popular civic awareness, he has prevented the construction of luxury hotels, four-lane road expansions and asphalt parking lots. He is also credited with stopping the construction of a cable car to the sacred Monte Alban, and preventing the establishment of a McDonald's outlet in the town's main square. Far from preventing Oaxaca's development, through this activism the town has been transformed into one of Mexico's major cultural, artistic and political hubs.

RIGHT LIVELIHOOD
AWARD FOUNDATION

