

TINA MODOTTI // A LIFE BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

Udine 1896 – City of Mexico 1942

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Assunta Adelaide Luigia Modotti was born in Borgo Pracchiuso in Udine on August 17, 1896. Known as Tina, she was the second of four children. Her father Giuseppe, a labourer, was a socialist anarchist, her mother Assunta Mondini a seamstress. At the age of just two, her family emigrated to Austria in search of work. In 1905 her father emigrated again, this time to America. He took his eldest daughter Mercedes with him, hoping the rest of the family would follow soon. At only twelve Tina left school to help support her family, working in a spinning mill. It wasn't until 1913 that her father managed to send 100 dollars and a ticket for the passage across the ocean. Tina left alone and, after a long journey, arrived in San Francisco, a city inspirationally rich in culture. It was to become "her adopted city". She worked as a seamstress with her sister Mercedes in Magnin's Magazine. Attending exhibitions, she also started acting through the immigrant amateur dramatics community of Little Italy. Her theatrical talents were appreciated and received favourable reviews.

Tina met the poet and painter Roubaix de L'Abrie Richey during a visit to an International Exhibition for the opening of the Panama Canal in 1915. Robo to his friends, they formed a loving artistic partnership. In 1917 she left the family home and moved to Los Angeles, to be with Robo. Both loved art and poetry, and their house became a bohemian hotspot for liberal artists. This was Tina's first great cultural and literary nexus and a watershed moment in her life. At the age of twenty four she entered the Hollywood scene of the 1920s, brushing shoulders with both actors and directors. Bit parts as the "exotic and sensual foreign woman" were to follow in "The Tiger's Coat" and two other productions. Artistically stifled by silent film, she moved on. Her beauty and expressiveness caught the eye of the photographer Edward Weston. He was a great friend of her husband Robo, who had invited him into their home. A sentimental bond, wracked by feelings of guilt, was soon to flourish between them.

Robo Richey died of smallpox on February 9, 1922, during a solo trip to Mexico. Tina's introduction to Mexico was the sad occasion of her husband's funeral. She discovered a country that was to hold her spellbound for years to come, and was soon to make it her own. For Tina, already a widow at 25, what could be seen as a wilderness year was to follow, but in July 1923, with so much emotionally and intellectually in common, she and Edward left California to pursue Robo's Mexican dream.

The Mexico they arrived in was in full post-revolutionary political and cultural ferment. They fell in with the great Muralists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco, founders of the Artists Union, and frequented the Mexican Communist Party, along with *El Machete*, a newspaper that was giving a political voice to the workers.

In the meantime, Edward Weston shot a famous series of nude portraits on their rooftop terrace. "Tina on the azotea" was to become the subject of both morbid curiosity and a cause for scandal in straitlaced society. Edward shared his photographic techniques with Tina, as well as his concept of formal and purist art. She soon went on to acquire her own individual expressive autonomy. At the end of 1924 an exhibition of both their portrait photography and still lifes was inaugurated in the presence of the Mexican Head of State.

In 1926 the couple travelled in land for three months to capture images for Anita Brenner's "Idols Behind Altars". Any emotional ties that they might have had were being eaten away by jealousies and lies and rapidly deteriorating, all of which was not helped by Tina's growing social commitment. On their return, Weston moved back to California, for good. They stayed in touch for some years by letters, in which Tina, now a recognised photographer in her own right, continued to express her devotion to her mentor and life companion.

.. 1 / segue

In 1927, Tina teamed up with Xavier Guerrero, painter, muralist and political activist, deeply committed to leftist ideals, "the man of Tina's political evolution". She joined the Communist Party, where she met Vittorio Vidali, from Trieste, not far from where she was born. The two Italians abroad struck up a friendship. He had been travelling Central America on behalf of Stalin, and in September 1928 returned to the Soviet Union. Tina fell in with Julio Antonio Mella, a young Cuban revolutionary and founder of the Liga Antimperialista. He too was part of the Communist Party, though a dissident, and part of the community of Cuban exiles in Mexico City who had fled the dictator Machado. Mella and Tina were deeply in love, and with him by her side, her work as a dedicated photographer and committed political militant reached new levels. On the evening of January 10, 1929, on his way home to the woman he loved, Julio Mella was assassinated by Machado's hitmen. The establishment accused Tina, and the Communist Party as a whole, of complicity in the murder of the young dissident. Shaken by the tragedy, and outraged at the government's attempted cover up of the political instigation behind, and the execution of, the assassination, Tina abandoned the capital for six months. An in depth coverage of Tehuantepec and its surrounding region was to follow. In December 1929, Tina herself inaugurated an appraisal of her work at the University of Mexico. The show came to be seen as revolutionary, given its subject matter and the quality of the photographs.

On February 5, 1930, Tina was accused of, and imprisoned for, being part of an assassination attempt on newly elected President Pascual Ortiz Rubio. Expelled from Mexico, she set sail for Rotterdam, together with Vittorio Vidali. Ending up in Berlin, she tried to work in photography, but photojournalism wasn't her thing. Unashamedly anti-fascist, she was barred from joining any political organisation that openly criticised Hitler's rise to power.

In October 1930 Tina arrived in Moscow, where Vidali was waiting for her. She obtained Soviet citizenship and worked as a translator for the foreign press, wrote pamphlets on capitalism and dedicated herself to active work in the International Red Aid.

Her life revolved around Moscow, Warsaw, Vienna, Madrid and Paris, working to help victims of political persecution. But in 1935 Stalinist purges were to hit both the ruling class and intellectuals. On the suggestion of Elena Stassova, Stalin's secretary, both Tina and Vidali were expelled from the country. Tina arrived in Madrid at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936.

For three terrible years of bloodshed between the Republicans and Franco's fascists, she became Maria Sanchez of the Spanish Red Aid, companion of Vidali, AKA Carlos of the V Regiment. She worked in hospitals, wrote propaganda, and made friends with other fighters of the International Brigades, meeting Robert Capa and Gerda Taro, the poet Miguel Hernández, Hemingway and Pablo Neruda. In full retreat and under incessant bombing, with the Spanish Republican cause close to her heart, she helped refugees heading for the border in their escape from Francoism.

In 1939 the newly elected president of Mexico, Lázaro Cárdenas del Río, cancelled Tina and Vidali's expulsion order, opening the way for their return.

Life back "home" was tough. Tina scraped together a living doing translations, while dedicating herself to helping Spanish veterans. Trotsky had been living in Mexico City for a few years before his assassination, on Stalin's orders, in 1940. Vidali was suspected of involvement, and Tina ended up living a segregated life at home, more and more isolated from the Communist Party.

Tina Modotti died of a heart attack on the night of January 5, 1942, in the taxi taking her home from dinner with friends at the house of the architect Hannes Mayer, a German refugee. Five days earlier, Tina had celebrated Christmas with her friend Pablo Neruda.

Just like with the murder of Julio Antonio Mella twelve years earlier, the establishment tried to peddle Tina's death as a political crime, putting the blame on Vittorio Vidali.

In response, an outraged Pablo Neruda wrote his political tribute and personal farewell, "Tina Modotti is dead". Published by all newspapers, it helped silence any evil tongues.

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The Italy Years 1896-1913

“When Tina was still a little girl...”

From sister Yolanda’s memoirs, “recollections of Tina”. Yolanda died in Los Angeles in 1998.

“I was younger than her, so even if Tina was still just a kid, to me she already seemed like a young woman, with those big, sad eyes of hers. Of the six of us, she was the only one who worked to earn some money. She worked twelve hours a day, in a silk mill, and no matter what they gave her to do, her fingers were always bruised and sore.

I remember one evening in early winter. As usual the fire and the candle had gone out. My mother and I were waiting for Tina, cuddled up to keep warm, dejected and miserable in the darkness with nothing to eat...

When we were kids the biggest worry was always finding something to eat; there were no toys or even time to play. The smallest of us siblings would often cry after school when there was nothing to eat. But Tina never said a word and quietly went off to bed as soon as she got in from work.

That night, we at last heard the sound of her footsteps...”

Dida foto: Borgo Pracchiuso, the working-class suburb of Udine where Tina was born and where her father Giuseppe, an anarchist socialist, demonstrated at the May 1st celebration, Labour Day

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The California Years 1915-1922

Tina Modotti – American Poet

Tina Modotti wrote PLENIPOTENTIARY between 1921 and 1922. It first appeared in The Dial, in May 1923. This was an American avant-garde magazine directed by John Cowper Powys.

The unexpected foray into the world of poetry was a one off in Tina's vast array of artistic talent. She signed the piece Tina De Richey. Tina had married the caricaturist and painter Roubaix De L'Abrie Richey, known as Robo, in 1917. The poem is a fine example of the talents of this young Italian immigrant, whose artistic mettle was forged in the America of the early 1920s. This exhilarating and constructive period of her life in California lasted nine years.

By the time she wrote PLENIPOTENTIARY, Tina Modotti had sampled all the cultural resources that her new American world had to offer. She had arrived in 1913, from Friuli in northeast Italy, and carved out a place in the acting and modelling world. Her brief flirtation with Hollywood ended in 1922 with "I Can Explain", while as a model she posed for some of the leading photographers of the time, including Arnold Schroeder and Wallace Sheele, and most of all for Edward Weston's striking series of portraits.

Her artistic quest was fired by curiosity and ambition, stoked by rubbing shoulders with the cultural avant-garde of Los Angeles. First in line was Robo Richey, who helped bring out the innate talent that had lain smouldering and yearning deep down inside. Taking on a cosmopolitan air, the world was now her oyster, and this was reflected in the poem's title, PLENIPOTENTIARY. She wrote in English, by now a second language to her.

PLENIPOTENTIARY

I like to swing from the sky
And drop down on Europe
Bounce up again like a rubber ball
Reach a hand down on the roof of the Kremlin,
Steal a tile
And throw it to the Kaiser,
Be good;
I will divide the moon in three parts,
The biggest will be yours.
Don't eat too fast.

Tina Modotti De Richey, Los Angeles, 1923

Tina Modotti e Robo Richey- Los Angeles 1921

Tina Modotti a Hollywood, 1920-21

A young man, eyes misty with dreams...nothing but a dreamer and idealist, who desperately suffered the tragedy of his unexpressed emotions...only people who feel, with deep emotion, above all artists, can understand the tragedy of these words...because at the end of the day,

what can an artist be but an expression of feelings and desire, each to their own, facing that same struggle, that difficulty in expressing oneself.

Many die too late, and, some too soon, and, in the end one wonders...does one ever die at the right moment? Also sprach Zarathustra...this tireless young man, in his pursuit of beauty, ardent lover of beautiful words, exuberant colours, and dreams that were for him both salvation and a cross to bear, did he die at the right moment? Only those of us who knew and loved him, wish him not gone! Robo is thirty-one years old and death has come swiftly, inexorably, and he has vanished from a world to which he did not belong...Your bride, Tina..."

written by TINA to her companion ROUBAIX DE L'ABRIE RICHEY, 1922, after his death (from the book "The Book of Robo" by John Cowper Powys)

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The Mexico Years 1923 – 1929

Life with Weston 1923 – 1926

EDWARD WESTON'S FORMAL VISION OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND TINA MODOTTI'S "FLOREAL STILL LIFE" PERIOD

Tina arrived in Mexico City on July 23, 1923, accompanied by Californian photographer Edward Weston. The two were madly in love.

At the outset, needing to make ends meet, Weston used Tina as his model. The series of sensual nude portraits that followed caused a stir among the Mexican bourgeoisie, but was enough to draw attention and curiosity to this gringo photographer, already a well-established name in American Photography. They also pulled in a considerable number of customers.

Weston's goal was to teach Tina all he knew about photography. Tina took it all on board. At a time when other photographers were going as far as touching up their work with brush and paint, Weston was shifting to Modernist Photography, believing in the clarity and mechanical precision of the camera. This was the opposite of the Pictorialist school that preceded it, which relied on dark room tricks and soft focus to arrive at an image that harked back to painting, rather than the stark reality of Modernism.

In technical terms, Weston's was formal and abstract photography, focusing on clarity in a synthetic and structural composition of the subject. Sharp focus and crisp detail were manipulated to stimulate deeper emotions, in a mix of perfect framing, and a gameplay between light and shadow in the vast gamut of shades of grey that black and white photography has to offer.

The first camera that Weston gave to Tina was a Korona 4/5 inch normal lens. They both also used a Graflex 3¼ by 4¼ inches, equipped with a tripod. Its Tessar F/4.5 lens meant that the subject could be super enlarged.

Negatives were developed with the slow and laborious chemical process of platinum copies. Most people stuck with far easier to use, and cheaper, silver printing paper, with silver salts embedded in a gelatine film. Silver paper could be developed in the dark room under artificial light. Platinum salts need ultraviolet light to react, so Tina, fast learning the tricks of the trade, would run out on to the terrace to expose the negative to the sun.

The advantage of the costly platinum printing paper was that it produced a brighter image, with the subject stepping out from the print, detached from its surroundings.

Tina's emergence as a prominent photographer can be seen in her choice of subject, and how she framed her chosen image. In her early career she focused on studio still life photography: flowers, plants, call a lilies, roses and pots of geraniums; as well as portraits of children and adults from the Mexican bourgeoisie. There were also photos of friends from the couple's cultural sphere: Diego Rivera himself, Lupe Marín, Xavier Guerrero, Anita Brenner and the actress Dolores Del Rio. . . . *segue* . . .

Desperate to learn and learn fast, Tina practiced her tutor's craft and technique on anything she found around the home. "Glasses" was an early experiment in photomontage, superimposing multiple negatives of photos of wine glasses, thus multiplying their reflections. Later, Tina took to the streets of Mexico City with the heavy and awkward Graflex. Not only was it hard work physically, but it needed a trained eye and a lot of patience. She captured the first signs of modernity that the burgeoning city had to offer: "Telegraph Wires" and "Stairways of a Stadium". These shots would appear in the magazines "Forma" and "Horizonte", a platform for Germán Arzubide and Marce Maples Mexican avant-garde Estridentismo Movement. Tina and Weston would both capture the same themes or motifs, but from the outset, comparing versions of the same subject, their difference in approach is obvious. Tina has a more subjective and social vision of her subject. By placing a human being, a man on the street, at the forefront, her aim was to make the environment she pictured more lived in, both spatially and temporally. Weston, on the other hand, extracts the subject from its environment, isolating it from its "temporal space". Instead, it becomes an abstract composition of shapes and lines. His Art was conceived as formal and abstract, realistic and devoid of any personal content. Edward Weston could see that Tina was by now standing on her own two feet. The elegance of form the he had taught her, with its geometric settings and original perspective cuts were to remain in her work, but she had found her own artistic voice. At their first exhibition together, in Mexico City at the Palacio de Minería, Tina and Weston exhibited ten photos each. The show was a great success, but when comparing their photos, it was clear that they both had different visions of Art.

Edward Weston expressed his satisfaction with his student:

"I am so proud of my beloved apprentice... I would have been happy to have had my name on many of her photographs! Her photographs lose nothing in comparison with mine; they are her direct means of communication".

The Daybooks of Edward Weston, 1924

On that occasion Edward Weston made a statement about his concept of photography: *"The camera should be used for a recording of life, for rendering the very substance and quintessence of the thing itself, whether it be polished steel or palpitating flesh! A footage of reality that displays the substance of an object as a beautiful and abstract form in itself, free of any personal interpretation or narrative, never to be seen as a photograph, but as an escape from, or deformation of, reality. Photography as an artistic expression is as genuine as painting or sculpture, and its vision of Art also reveals a great openness towards the world!"*

TINA MODOTTI WOMAN - PHOTOGRAPHER - MILITANT

// A life between two worlds

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The exhibition “Tina Modotti, Woman - Photographer - Militant: A life between two worlds” is a project of the Cultural Association ONLUS “8 Marzo” now merged into the A.P.S. “Storia e Memoria dei Castelli Romani”.

It was put together in close collaboration with the Secretariat of Culture of the Government of Mexico. This is one of the most significant photographic collections from the Tina Modotti archives.

Images come from negatives in the Collection of the National System of Photographic Archives (SINAFO) of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH) of the City of Pachuca Hidalgo, Mexico.

The 60 images make up 71% of the Tina Modotti Photographic Fund.

The fund’s archive includes 94 original images (84 negatives and 10 slides), a significant part of the photographer’s artistic production.

The photographs illustrate Tina Modotti's integration in Mexico in the 1920s, her contact with the cultural environments of the time, her radicalization to the Mexican Communist Party (PCM), up to the last photos taken in Berlin in exile, in 1938.

It also includes her photographic record taken at the heart of the Spanish Civil War, with the vicissitudes of that human tragedy and Tina's commitment to the Spanish Red Aid, before the painful conclusion, in Mexico City in 1942. The exhibition ends with images of the commemorative stamps dedicated to Tina Modotti by the Ministry of Development and Poste Italiane, a sign of recognition that the State pays to the highest personalities.

TINA MODOTTI Project

Ada Scalchi, coordinator and project manager

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Dr. Rosa Angélica Rodríguez Villalba, responsible for relations with International Institutions and cultural superintendent of the project.

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The Mexico Years 1923 – 1929

Life with X and Tina's symbolic allegorical period 1927 – 1928

Xavier Guerrero, Painter and political activist (1896-1974), "The Man behind Tina's Political Evolution"

With Weston's move back to California in 1927, Tina teamed up with Xavier Guerrero, a painter, designer and muralist, inspired by Mexico's pre-Columbian Olmec roots.

Xavier was born in 1896 in the State of Coahuila, northern Mexico. He had learned this trade mixing paint for his father, who had a workshop decorating haciendas. He came to be known as the craftsman of Muralism, given his familiarity with, and ability to mix, colours. By his mid-twenties he was collaborating with Diego Rivera. In 1923 his constant presence and active militancy within the Socialist Workers Party led into the Mexican Communist Party. In the same year that she met Xavier, Tina joined the Partido Comunista Mexicano. Xavier wrote to Tina:

"It is almost impossible for me to reconcile my work as a painter with my political activity...I can't have parallel activities, but staying out of Politics is almost impossible...There are entire neighbourhoods, the Colonies, where people live in absolute poverty! They lack everything, drains, sanitation, drinking water! This is what you should photograph Tina...There is so much of the real world out there to photograph, and you can do your part with your work as a photographer, guiding people's attention through your camera lens! Photography as an arm in the social struggle! You and Edward have been blind to all but the picturesque side of this country! Your own personal view of a Mexico which is nothing more than a chocolate box of visual treats!"

Tina's farewell letter to Xavier Guerrero, political militant and comrade

"But now the time has come for me to tell you what I have to tell you...I love another and he loves me and this love has led to what I would never have thought possible: I have stopped loving you...X, I could talk to you at length about this love, how it was born, how it grew, to the point of deciding to talk to you about it...I could tell you how much this quandary has tortured me; I have thought about everything, especially about you. But even more, I have reflected on the consequences of my actions on our revolutionary activities...and I have come to the conclusion that, wherever I am, with you or with someone else, the little I can do for the cause, our cause, will not suffer, because working for the cause is not, for me, something external to me, brought on by loving a revolutionary, but on the contrary, it is the result of a very deep internal commitment. And much of this I owe to you, X. You are the one that opened my eyes and helped me at a time when I felt that the solid ground, founded on my old beliefs, was sinking beneath my feet. Absolute hell, X! I only hope that you never doubt the sincerity of my love for you, and I swear to you that the feelings I have had for you have been the greatest pride of my life..."

Dida foto: Children in the Bolsa Colony

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The Mexico Years 1923 – 1929

THE STAY IN TEHUANTEPEC June-October 1929

The Mexico Years 1923 - 1929

Letter from Tina to Weston

September 17, 1929, a few months before being extradited from Mexico

“Dear Edward, what’s up with you? Why so quiet? Write me soon... I’m still in Mexico, but it’s so beastly not knowing how long they’ll let me stay, so it’s almost impossible to make work plans, although the best choice would be to just carry on, do everything one sets out to do, like nothing’s happening... I’m sending you some photos of Tehuantepec...I’m only sending you the ones I have duplicates of... of course when I was there, I took a lot, but most are in this state...very blurry... I took them in the street.

The Tehuano women, in their traditional dress, as soon as they saw me with my camera, straightway upped their pace, walked faster... it’s not as if they don’t already walk quickly normally! I’m seriously thinking about having an Exhibition soon; it feels like I’ll have to leave the country in a bit, and it’s like I owe the place an exhibition, not so much of what I’ve done here, but of what could be done here, without falling back onto colonial churches, Mexican cow boys and their ‘chinas poblanas’, and the same dross that the majority of photographers practice! I hadn’t told you that they offered me a job as Official Photographer of the National Museum, and much as I was tempted to accept, I couldn’t, as a member of the Party and Julio’s partner, because the Government had done nothing to bring Julio’s murderers to justice, and when they did lay their hands on the guiltiest of those to blame they set him free! Tehuantepec, in the south of the country! Such a peaceful place! They say the women there, the Tehuanas, walk quickly! Beautiful Zapotec women, almost mythological figures, independent, organised into a kind of matriarchy, they practice free love and are only religious on feast days! Dressed in their colourful and showy traditional costumes, adorned with necklaces and earrings, they carry heavy containers on their heads, walking quickly, proudly, face front, almost in defiance of the future!”

Tina Modotti spent six months in Teuhantepec, between June and October 1929. She set aside her most striking images of her time there for the mythical Teuhana women: “Teuhuan in axicaplectle”, “Washing at the River near Tehuantepec” and others besides. The incredible realism and humility of Tina’s photographs makes them unique, a social document that captures the unruffled pride of these women, full of sensuality, in love with life itself.

They were to be the last pictures Tina Modotti took in Mexico, before being extradited for her revolutionary photography.

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A Year in Berlin 1930

Extradition from Mexico and arrival in Berlin

Letter from Tina Modotti to Edward Weston, on board the Dutch steamer Edam to Europe, February 25, 1930

“Dear Edward, you will have already been told of what happened to me, that I was put in prison for thirteen days and then deported...and you will also know whatpretext the Government came up with for my arrest...that I was a part of the recent attack on the President elect no less...you get to realise how cunning governing powers can be...they awaited the moment when, in the public mind, the opinion of foreigners had hit such a low, that people were ready to believe whatever they read or were told... and what a relief for them to know that that blood thirsty Tina Modotti was leaving Mexican shores forever!... I am sure that, no matter how fervid an imagination you might believe I have, you couldn't see me as a terrorist or the head of some bomb-throwing brigade... the conservative press says my house was full of all kinds of evidence, documents, terrorist plans, to cut it short, everything needed to kill Ortiz Rubio...that's theversion that public opinion swilled down as the truth with their morning coffee...!

I am headed to Europe now, to a new life or at least a different one...I am going to Germany...please write to me at this address: Chattopatoya Friedrich Strasse 24/IV, Berlin S. W. 48”

Letter from Tina to Edward Weston, March 9, 1930

“Oh, Edward, I'm finally in Berlin!... a lovely city, though I've not seen the sun since I got here, and for someone from Mexico, the change is quite unkind!... Have I told you about the surprise I got when I arrived here, discovering that all over Europe, films, paper, cameras, etc., everything has different sizes?... Then there's the problem of different measurements; not grains but grams. And then to top it all off, the problem of the language!... Even in the field of photography I don't know which way to turn... the competition is strong and prices so low that I don't feel like joining the chase and competing with others... I've been offered a job doing “reportage”, that would befor newspapers, but that doesn't really feel like me. I still see it as men's work, even if a lot of women do it here. They are committed, and may be capable, but I'm not aggressive enough. Even the kind of propaganda photography that I started doing in Mexico is old hat here; there's a ‘Worker-Photographer Movement’ (everyone here in Germany knows how to use a camera) and it's the workers that take pictures of themselves, and, to tell the truth, they get better opportunities than I could, since they photograph their own lives and problems. Of course the results are far from the standards I try to maintain in photography, but they still achieve their goal! I know very well that what's on offer on the street is rich and wonderful, but my experience comes from working slowly, planning my compositions, etc., not exactly what's called for in journalistic work. Before I've found the right composition or expression, the photo has vanished. I'm afraid that wanting the impossible means I don't achieve anything... Oh, if only I had someone to talk to, someone who can understand me, like you, Edward!”

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The Death of Tina Modotti

Tina and Vittorio Vidali spent the evening of January 5, 1942, at the home of the German architect Hannes Meyer. It was a dinner in the company of other Spanish refugees who fought with them during the Spanish Civil War against Francoism, in 1936. Tina suffered a heart attack and died on the back seat of the taxi taking her home.

The seemingly blurred circumstances of her death gave the conservative press a chance to open the floodgates and stir up public opinion, harking back to suspicions about the murder of the young Julio Mella, twelve years earlier, when Tina had been accused of complicity in the crime. Recycling gossip as fact, the newspapers put Tina's death down to a political crime committed by her partner because Tina, on her return from Spain, though still involved with *El Machete*, the communist party voice, had turned her back on the Party itself. She needed to be eliminated as someone who knew too much! Tina and Vidali's friends and political comrades rejected the accusations, most of all Pablo Neruda. In his desire to distance Tina from rumours about Vidali, and the sordid manipulation of the facts that was going on, the Chilean poet wrote "TINA HA MUERTO!" as a celebration of his esteem for an example of life dedicated to commitment, revolutionary passion and art. He read the poem on the morning of her funeral, at her grave side, in the presence of other intellectuals. It also appeared in *El Machete*.

In his personal way, Neruda silenced the foul mouths of public opinion, fired by press gossip.

Neruda had seen Tina five days earlier, for Christmas. He had arrived in Mexico a year after Tina, in 1940. At the time of Tina's death, he was the Chilean government's consul general in Mexico City. There were many points of common political interest between the two and they shared the need to help those politically persecuted. They had first met at the Congress of Anti-Fascist Intellectuals in Valencia, during the Spanish Civil War. Then again in Madrid, in 1937, where Tina, in addition to being a Red Cross nurse, was acting as interpreter for the numerous intellectuals who had come from all over Europe to support the Republic.

Neruda's verses perfectly summarise Tina's qualities, and express the poet's admiring and complicit gaze, as well as his esteem and gratitude for a fragile but steely woman in his celebration of one with whom he recognised a shared appreciation of an existential, social and artistic world. The first verses of the poem can be read on Tina's tomb at the Panteon Dolores in Mexico City, while the last are inscribed on her commemorative plaque in Udine.

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Pablo Neruda's Last Goodbye to Tina Modotti

TINA MODOTTI IS DEAD

Tina Modotti, sister, you do not sleep, no, you do not sleep.

Perhaps your heart hears the rose of yesterday
growing, the last rose of yesterday, the new rose.

Rest gently, sister.

The new rose is yours, the new earth is yours:

you have put on a new dress of deep seed

and your soft silence is filled with roots.

You shall not sleep in vain, sister.

Pure is your gentle name, pure is your fragile life.

Of bee, shadow, fire, snow, silence, foam,

of steel, line, pollen was built your tough,

your slender structure.

The jackal at the jewel of your sleeping body

still shows the white feather and the bloody soul

as if you, sister, could rise up,

smiling above the mud.

To my country I take you so that they will not touch you,

to my snow country so that your purity

will be far from the assassin, the jackal, the Judas:

there you will be at peace.

Do you hear a step, a step-filled step, something

huge from the great plain, from the Don, from the cold?

Do you hear the firm step of a soldier upon the snow?

Sister, they are your steps.

They will pass one day by your little tomb

before yesterday's roses are withered,

the steps of tomorrow will pass by to see

where your silence is burning.

A world marches to the place where you were going, sister.

The songs of your mouth advance each day

in the mouths of the glorious people that you loved.

Your heart was brave.

In your country's old kitchens, on the dusty roads,

something is said and passes on,

something returns to the flame of your golden people,

something awakes and sings.

They are your people, sister: those who today speak your name,

we who from everywhere, from the water and the land,

with your name leave unspoken and speak other names.

Because fire does not die.

Pablo Neruda , January 5, 1942