

Large Print Labels—English

**Abraham Ángel:
Between Wonder and Seduction**

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Abraham Ángel: Between Wonder and Seduction

Abraham Ángel (1905–1924) was one of the leading artists of his generation, yet he produced just 24 paintings before his sudden death at the age of 19. Full of individuality and uninhibited emotion, Ángel's paintings offer a glimpse of Mexico City during a time of widespread change. One of Mexico's first known queer artists, Ángel found belonging in the capital's rich avant-garde artistic scene. As a young man, he befriended the leading cultural figures of his time.

Abraham Ángel: Between Wonder and Seduction is the first survey of the artist's work in 35 years. This exhibition seeks to bring his vibrant paintings into focus and to reassess the life, work, and legacy of this legendary artist.

Beginnings

Ángel was born in 1905 in the town of El Oro de Hidalgo, but his family relocated to Mexico City in 1916. Five years later, he came into the orbit of the artist Adolfo Best Maugard (1891–1964), under whose guidance he first began to paint seriously. It was probably through Maugard that, in 1922, he met the painter Manuel Rodríguez Lozano (1896–1971) and the two began an intense romantic relationship. Strong connections exist between their work, with both painters exploring themes of urban life and modernity, but Ángel managed to create his own distinct visual style to depict these subjects.

Self-Portrait

1923

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico, 1905—died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Oil on cardboard

Ángel painted this work, his first self-portrait, when he was just 18. Although he stands against a lush landscape done in bold colors, it is his poised expression that captures our attention. Rather than look directly at us, he tilts his head, revealing a sideward gaze and the barest hint of a smile. Ángel seems to challenge our expectations of his youth or inexperience, asserting instead his maturity and confident artistic voice.

Museo Nacional de Arte, INBAL / Secretaría de Cultura

Conception

1921

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico, 1905—died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Paint and pencil on paper

When Ángel was just 16, he met the painter Adolfo Best Maugard, who was seeking artists to help teach his new drawing method. Maugard believed that by learning to combine seven basic design elements—the spiral, circle, half circle, S shape, zigzag, wavy line, and straight line—anyone could learn to create compelling works of art. Maugard used the Method in his own works, like his nearby *Self-Portrait*, and its influence is clearly visible here, in Ángel's earliest painting.

Jorge Garza Aguilar Collection

Self-Portrait

1922

Adolfo Best Maugard

Born in Mexico City, Mexico, 1891–
died in Athens, Greece, 1964

Oil on cardboard

Private collection

Butterfly

1922

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico, 1905—died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Watercolor and ink on cardboard

Ángel joined a group of artists who were teaching and promoting Adolfo Best Maugard's Method, and it was likely as a member of this circle that he met the painter Manuel Rodríguez Lozano. Both artists saw the Method's creative potential, and it formed the foundation of their painting styles. In *Butterfly*, Ángel pushes beyond the Method's emphasis on pure design, pairing his composition with a snippet of what is likely his own poetry: "the serpent, furious, pursued the butterflies, who drank from a rose bush."

Museo de Arte Moderno del Estado de México, Toluca

Untitled (Butterfly)

About 1922

Manuel Rodríguez Lozano

Born in Mexico City, Mexico, 1896—
died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1971

Gouache on paper

Museo Nacional de Arte, INBAL / Secretaría de
Cultura

Portrait of Manuel Rodríguez Lozano

1922

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico, 1905—died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Varnished tempera on cardboard

After they met in 1922, Ángel and Rodríguez Lozano began a romantic relationship, moving in together shortly thereafter. Around this same time, Ángel painted this tender portrait of his partner, who was almost 10 years his senior. Rodríguez Lozano had recently returned from living in Europe and was a rising star in the Mexican art scene. Although the two men's styles are distinct from one another, Ángel and Rodríguez Lozano's partnership was artistic as well as romantic. Their shared workspace and interests inevitably caused them to influence each other's work.

Museo de Aguascalientes, INBAL / Secretaría de Cultura

Modernity

In 1923 Ángel began a period of intense artistic production that lasted for the remainder of his life. Like many of his contemporaries, Ángel was interested in defining modern Mexican identity and turned to the nation's unique features, such as its natural environment and Indigenous cultures, for potential subjects to represent in art what it meant to be Mexican. Ángel stands out for his focus on portraiture, utilizing the genre to reflect not only the nation's new identity but also his own.

Tropical Landscape

1922

Manuel Rodríguez Lozano

Born in Mexico City, Mexico, 1896—
died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1971

Acrylic on cardboard

Colección Banco Nacional de México



Tepito

1923

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico, 1905—died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Oil on cardboard

Ángel painted a series of four landscapes in 1923, but only *Tepito* has been located. Although today the town of Tepito has been enveloped by Mexico City, in the 1920s it was surrounded by open countryside. Both Manuel Rodríguez Lozano and Ángel sought to define Mexico's landscape through not only its unique natural features but also its man-made structures. Ángel was particularly interested in places like Tepito, where the natural, rural, and urban environments were beginning to converge.

Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College, Hanover, New Hampshire. Gift of Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, P.935.1.1

Landscape (The Little Mule)

1923

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico,
1905–died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Oil on cardboard

Originally called “Landscape,” this painting is affectionately known as “The Little Mule” after the animal drawing a cart through this anonymous town’s streets. This scene emphasizes the mingling of the natural and man-made world, with mountains looming closely over the buildings and trees dotting the roads. One of the trees partially obscures the sign on a pulquería, a type of tavern that specializes in serving pulque, a popular beverage made from the fermented sap of the agave plant.

Museo de Arte Moderno, INBAL / Secretaría de
Cultura

The Indian Woman

1923

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico,
1905—died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Oil on cardboard

Many artists considered Mexico's Indigenous peoples to be an important source of the nation's identity, in part because their culture and traditions were shaped by Mexico's unique environment. Ángel explores this idea in this anonymous portrait, which he titled *The Indian Woman*. He creates visual cues that connect his model to the landscape around her, such as the shared color of her skin and the soil beneath her feet, and the positioning of her head as a third peak among the mountains on the horizon.

Museo Nacional de Arte, INBAL / Secretaría de
Cultura

The Waitress

1923

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico,
1905—died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Oil on cardboard

Museo de Arte Moderno, INBAL / Secretaría de
Cultura



The Girl in the Window

1923

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico, 1905—died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Oil on cardboard

In the four portraits on this wall, Ángel emphasizes the changing role of women in Mexico in the 1920s as they left their homes to explore new opportunities for employment and education. Staring outward with direct gazes, their contemporary fashion and bob haircuts announce their modernity. In choosing to depict women who were transgressing social norms, Ángel may be evoking his own status as someone who had broken traditional expectations by living semi-openly with Manuel Rodríguez Lozano.

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Lupe and María

1923

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico,
1905—died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Oil on cardboard

Museo de Arte Moderno, INBAL / Secretaría de
Cultura

Portrait of Cristina Crespo

1924

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico,
1905–died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Oil on cardboard

Cristina Crespo was the sister of the art critic Jorge Juan Crespo de la Serna, whom Ángel had met through their work for Adolfo Best Maugard. As with the other paintings on this wall, Ángel emphasizes Crespo's independence through her direct gaze and appearance. The portrait also draws connections between societal changes and urban expansion. While a rural town is visible in the background on the left, a growing cityscape appears to the right of Crespo. The city's skyline is dominated by a large radio tower, an emblem of the transformations wrought by modernization.

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Cultura

The Couple

1924

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico, 1905—died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Oil on cardboard

The identity of these sitters is unknown, yet their chemistry evokes a sense of intimacy and affection that is likely the source of the painting's title. It was once owned by Ángel's friend and colleague the painter Miguel Covarrubias, who lent it in 1940 to a landmark exhibition of Mexican art held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. An exhibition review in *Vogue* magazine featured *The Couple* as a full-page spread and thus introduced Ángel's work to a mass audience in the United States.

Private collection

Portrait of Concepción Villalobos de Card

1923

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico,
1905—died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Tempera on cardboard

Ángel produced several portraits of his immediate family. This depiction of “Concha,” who was married to his brother Francisco, is the earliest. He positioned his family members closer to the viewer than he did his other subjects. As seen here, the landscape settings are less detailed and have been pushed closer to the edges of the canvas. The unfinished portrait drawing hanging to your left shows some of these same qualities and may also depict someone related to Ángel.

Museo de Aguascalientes, INBAL / Secretaría de
Cultura

Portrait of an Unknown Sitter

1924

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico,
1905—died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Pencil on cardboard

Museo Universitario José Juárez,
Universidad Autónoma de Guerrero

The Family

1924

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico,
1905–died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Oil on board

In this captivating triple portrait, Ángel appears at the center, with his mother, Francisca, on the left and his sister Amelia on the right. While Francisca's expression evokes motherly concern, Amelia, with her sideward glance and raised hand, appears bold and playful. As in his other portraits of women, Ángel emphasizes his sister's status as modern and independent. The effect is heightened in another portrait of Amelia, hanging to your left, that he completed the same year. Here, the artist places Amelia against acidic purple wallpaper hung with landscapes, capturing a sense of his sister's brash personality.

Museo de Arte Moderno, INBAL / Secretaría de
Cultura

The Girl (Portrait of Amelia Card Valdés)

1924

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico,
1905–died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Acrylic on cardboard

Colección Banco Nacional de México



Identity

In the 1920s, attitudes toward homosexuality changed in Europe and the Americas as queer people formed increasingly visible subcultures in metropolitan centers like Mexico City. Ángel and Manuel Rodríguez Lozano were part of a large social network that included several writers and artists who had same-sex relationships. Within this context, portraiture became a way to express a person's desires and relationships. Ángel's depictions of members of his social circle speak—overtly or subtly—to a shared queer culture.

Portrait of Xavier Villaurrutia

About 1921

Roberto Montenegro

Born in Guadalajara, Mexico, 1885—
died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1968

Oil on canvas

The poet and writer Xavier Villaurrutia knew Ángel socially and wrote a piece praising the artist following his death. Both Villaurrutia and the painter of this portrait, Roberto Montenegro, are known to have had same-sex relationships. Although this portrait is unremarkable at first glance, friends of the two men would have understood the queer resonance. Montenegro depicts Villaurrutia with the dandyish style and bearing of writers like Oscar Wilde and André Gide, evoking his shared identity with well-known queer figures.

Private collection



Portrait of Salvador Novo

1924

Manuel Rodríguez Lozano

Born in Mexico City, Mexico, 1896—
died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1971

Oil on cardboard

In this iconic painting, Rodríguez Lozano depicts the openly gay poet Salvador Novo traveling through downtown Mexico City in the backseat of a taxi. Although streetlamps and vehicles capture the capital's increasing urbanization, those close to Novo would have intuited other meanings. The poet was vocal about his fondness for blue-collar taxi drivers, and the passing neighborhood contained numerous cafes and bars where gay men could safely socialize.

Museo Nacional de Arte, INBAL / Secretaría de
Cultura



The Cadet

1923

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico, 1905—died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Oil on cardboard

As seen on your left in Manuel Rodríguez Lozano's *Portrait of Salvador Novo*, this work alludes to a nocturnal world of men seeking the romantic company of other men on Mexico City's streets. Its subject, an anonymous military cadet, raises his collar to warm himself, but also to shield his face from prying eyes. Beyond a reference to 1920s queer culture, *The Cadet* also challenges social conventions that associated military prowess with machismo and heterosexuality.

Museo de Arte Moderno, INBAL / Secretaría de Cultura



Portrait of Hugo Tilghman

1924

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico, 1905—died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Oil on cardboard

Ángel likely met Hugo Tilghman when they both worked for Adolfo Best Maugard in the early 1920s. A gifted cartoonist, Tilghman was also known for his brawny physique. Rather than being a static image, Ángel's portrait captures Tilghman in motion and in triplicate. A muscular Tilghman appears in the foreground and then again in the background, playing tennis with himself. If Tilghman's athleticism represented a kind of macho male ideal, Ángel's choice of sport complicates that notion. Tennis was viewed by some in Mexico as elitist, and therefore effeminate.

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Legacy

On October 27, 1924, Ángel died in the apartment he shared with Manuel Rodríguez Lozano. In the nearly 100 years since that day, numerous theories have arisen to explain the artist's sudden passing. His death certificate states only that he died from heart failure caused by an unidentified toxin. In the wake of Ángel's death, his friends and colleagues became the caretakers of his artistic legacy, but none more so than Rodríguez Lozano, who wrote the first book on Ángel and actively promoted his work until his own death in 1971.

While the circumstances around Ángel's death remain unclear, some believe the artist took his own life.

We want to raise awareness about teen mental health. Twenty-two percent of U.S. high school students seriously consider attempting suicide. This crisis is especially acute for LGBTQ+ students, who are more than four times as likely to attempt suicide.

Help is available if you or someone you know needs support.

Take a flier to learn more about mental health resources, including counselors you can call or text.

The Trevor Project, 2022 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health
<https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2022/#intro>

Centers for Disease Control, Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2011–2021
https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/pdf/YRBS_Data-Summary-Trends_Report2023_508.pdf

I Kill Myself for a Traitorous Woman

1924

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico, 1905–died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Tempera on paper

Despite being one of his most well known works, *I Kill Myself for a Traitorous Woman* remains Ángel's least understood painting. Those who believe the artist took his own life see it as evidence of Ángel's mental state in the months leading up to his death. Yet key aspects of the work are still unknown, such as who is the "traitorous woman"? Regardless of these posthumous debates, the painting is a wrenching display of Ángel's ability to express intense emotion through art.

Museo de Arte Moderno del Estado de México, Toluca

Self-Portrait

1924

Manuel Rodríguez Lozano

Born in Mexico City, Mexico, 1896—
died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1971

Oil on cardboard

Scholars believe Rodríguez Lozano painted this self-portrait following Ángel's death, when he was still processing his loss. The artist's stoic expression and glassy eyes, sharply framed by the expansive black collar of his coat, seem to speak to his feelings of grief. After Ángel died in October 1924, Rodríguez Lozano traveled to Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he published several articles on Ángel's work and is believed to have organized the first exhibition of his paintings.

San Antonio Museum of Art, purchased with the Mary Kathryn Lynch Kurtz Fund for the Acquisition of Modern Latin American Art, 2015.21

Portrait of Abraham Ángel

1924

Manuel Rodríguez Lozano

Born in Mexico City, Mexico, 1896—
died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1971

Oil on cardboard

Rodríguez Lozano created this portrait of his lost companion not long after Ángel's death, preserving his youthful appearance in paint. In addition to tirelessly promoting Ángel's work, Rodríguez Lozano also inherited most of his paintings. He eventually sold them to a collector in Mexico City in the early 1930s, but by keeping them together he contributed to their eventual passage into Mexico's national art collection.

Museo de Arte Moderno, INBAL / Secretaría de
Cultura

Self-Portrait (Keep Going)

1924

Abraham Ángel

Born in El Oro, State of Mexico, Mexico, 1905—died in Mexico City, Mexico, 1924

Oil on paper

This small painting is thought to be Ángel's last work. It was painted as a frontispiece for the medical thesis of Dr. Raoul Fournier, a friend and noted collector of works by artists in Ángel's circle. In it we see a nude Ángel running along a path toward the rising sun, his arm encircled by a scroll inscribed with the phrase "Keep Going." Despite the brevity of Ángel's life, *Keep Going* invites us to celebrate the enduring impact of his work, which nearly a century after its creation continues to engage and captivate.

Private collection

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