



c. 1929

Gelatin silver print

Image and sheet: 8 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 7 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches
(21.3 x 18.7 cm)

TINA MODOTTI

Italian, 1896–1942

WOMAN OF TEHUANTEPEC

This black-and-white photograph shows a woman balancing a large painted **gourd** on her head. Tina Modotti (moe-DOT-tee), the photographer, took the picture in 1929 when she traveled to the town of Tehuantepec (tay-WAHN-tay-peck) in southern Mexico. The women in the town, known as “Tehuanas” (tay-WAHN-ahs), have long been admired for their strength, independence, and colorful clothing. Traditionally, they controlled the economic and political life in the region. Modotti took a series of photographs of Tehuana women engaged in everyday activities such as caring for their children and walking to market.

LET'S LOOK

What shapes and patterns do you see in this photograph?

From what angle was this photograph taken?
How does that affect the picture?

LET'S LOOK AGAIN

What might this woman be thinking and feeling?
What makes you say that?

Imagine the rest of the scene around the woman.
What is her story?

Modotti carefully composed this picture to draw attention to the woman's strength and beauty. Her stable posture, powerful gesture, and calm facial expression show her self-confidence. Modotti **cropped** the photograph so that the woman dominates the **composition**. She also took the picture from a low **vantage point** so that we look up at the woman, emphasizing her importance. Striking shapes and patterns frame her face—from the repeating triangles, squares, and diamonds in her dress, to her shiny circular pendant and earring, and the delicate flowers, fruits, and leaves painted on the gourd she carries.

Modotti was born in Italy and **immigrated** to California when she was sixteen years old. She moved to Mexico in 1923 and learned photography from the renowned American photographer Edward Weston. She became best known for her pictures of Mexican women, children, workers, and artisans. Both art and politics were equally important to Modotti, and she abandoned photography in 1932 to dedicate herself to political activism.

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