



Shadows, Fire, Snow: The Life of Tina Modotti

Patricia Albers

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Born in 1896, Tina Modotti lived one of the most brilliant lives of her era. A first-generation modernist photographer, she created internationally renowned images of extra-ordinary formal clarity and profound soulfulness. But Modotti's artistic achievement is only one facet of her astonishing story. A legendary beauty, spirited and sensuous, she scripted for herself a series of remarkable roles--glamorous actress; jazz age bohemian; Communist agent; and lover, colleague, and muse to photographer Edward Weston and painter Diego Rivera. Her friends included the illustrious--Frida Kahlo, Pablo Neruda, John Dos Passos, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Dorothea Lange, Sergei Eisenstein, and La Pasionaria--as well as workers, peasants, and humble people everywhere.

Filled with the rich details of Modotti's turbulent interior life and of her journey through the cultural and political upheavals of the 1920s and 1930s, *Shadows, Fire, Snow: The Life of Tina Modotti* is a provocative adventure. We follow the impoverished Italian immigrant to the San Francisco stage and to the glitter of early Hollywood, then on to the artistic circles of post-revolutionary Mexico. Dramatically expelled from her adopted country, Modotti made her way to Stalin's Moscow and to the Spanish Civil War, from which she emerged tormented by tragic memories. Returning to Mexico City, she died alone in a taxicab, probably of heart disease, though rumors persist that she was liquidated by her comrades.

Shadows, Fire, Snow: The Life of Tina Modotti is the first fully realized biography of this luminous figure. Drawing upon ten years of research and some 300 letters and photographs discovered in long-forgotten trunks in a family attic, author Patricia Albers brings new recognition to a talented, intelligent, and independent woman, whose bold quest is a prototype for contemporary seekers.

Ever a flamboyant personality, she was nonetheless pursued, even after death, by a glaring spotlight of publicity and controversy. Her burial, in a fifth-class tomb, drew many of the grand old warriors of international communism. Meanwhile, Mexico City's modern art gallery readied a retrospective of her photographs, and journalists dredged up yellowing scandal sheets shrieking of romance, violence, deceit, and Tina Modotti. . . . "The dramatic circumstances surrounding [her death] measured up to those of her agitated, subterranean, and adventurous life," typed one eager reporter. "Bees, shadows, fire, snow," intoned Chilean poet Pablo Neruda in his elegy, "silence and foam combining with steel and wire and pollen . . ."

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