

Today's Masterpiece: Anton Bruehl, [*Dolores*](#), 1933. Collotype on paper. Gift of Forrest D. Colburn, 2021.2.

Welcome back to Masterpiece Minute on Virtual SDMA. I'm your host, Kara Felt, the Lawrence S. Friedman Curator of Photography at The San Diego Museum of Art.

Today I want to highlight a small but powerful photograph that is currently on view in our Visible Vaults. *Dolores* was made by the Australian-born American photographer Anton Bruehl (1900–1982) during a trip to Mexico in 1932. Capturing the face of an Indigenous girl, Bruehl frames her intense gaze so closely that only the patterning of her shirt is visible at the lower edges—all sense of environment is evacuated to emphasize her determined expression. There is a radical intimacy and openness in such a head-on shot. Bruehl shared that he found the subject “so completely unaffected that anything but a direct presentation of the scene before me seemed insincere.” Importantly, Bruehl names her in the photograph’s title, reinforcing her individuality as well as the relationship established between Dolores and the photographer—Bruehl and his tripod are even visible in her pupil.

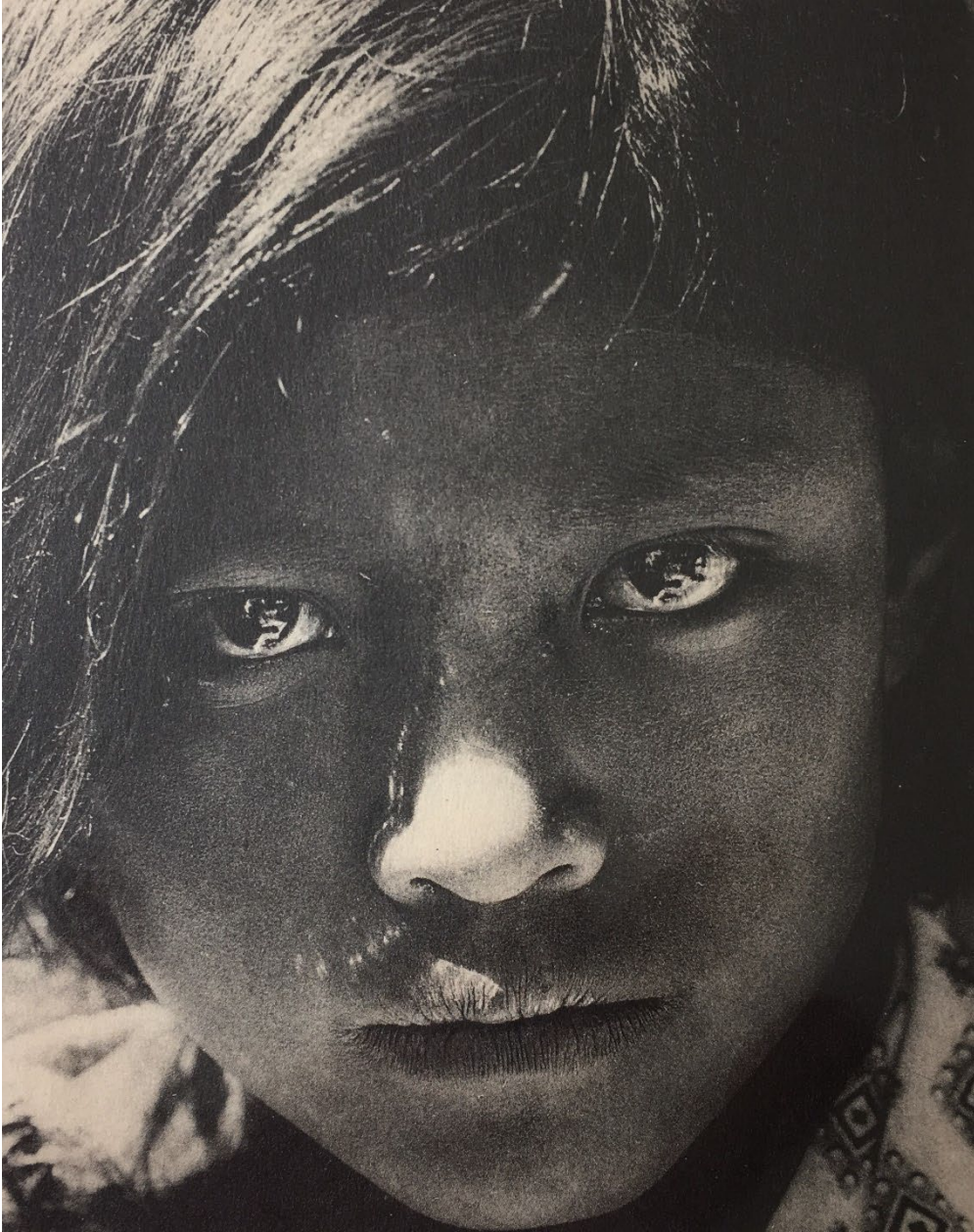
Dolores is the most widely reproduced picture from Bruehl’s *Photographs of Mexico* (1933), a photobook that is considered a classic of the genre. The book focuses on the nation’s people, especially in market scenes and pictures of children, women, and older adults, and employs many angles that were popular among modernist photographers of the twenties and thirties including shots from above and extreme close-ups. Bruehl’s book has been celebrated for defying stereotypes and exoticism and for representing the Mexican people in a straightforward way, even as an artist of European descent.

You may notice the strong high-altitude sunlight that plays on Dolores’s hair and face, giving her eyes a proud sparkle. Bruehl embraced natural lighting during his time in Mexico, which was a departure from the artificial studio lighting he used during his nearly four-decade career as a commercial photographer. Born and raised in Australia, Bruehl emigrated to the U.S. in 1919 and settled in New York City, where he ran a successful studio until the 1960s. Specializing in elaborately staged and carefully lit advertising photographs as well as portraits, his photographs were seen by millions of readers in Condé Nast magazines such as *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair*, and *House & Garden*. He is perhaps best known for helping to pioneer color photography for Condé Nast in the 1930s.

As much as *Dolores* portrays an individual, it also communicates its origins in Mexico in the vibrant decades after the Revolution when art was vital to rebuilding the nation. The most famous expression of this was the government-sponsored mural program that supported works by Mexican artists Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and José Clemente Orozco, who balanced modernity, new technologies, and international aesthetic currents with reference to Mexico’s history, traditions, and iconography. In the 1920s and 1930s, Mexico was propelled onto the world stage and Mexico City became a hub of the avant-garde, attracting photographers such as Paul Strand, Edward Weston, and Tina Modotti. Bruehl’s photograph reflects these dynamic cross-currents, honoring specifically Mexican subject matter while



expressing how photographers across the world used their cameras to explore different ways of seeing.



Today's Masterpiece: Anton Bruehl, [Dolores](#), 1933. Collotype on paper. Gift of Forrest D. Colburn, 2021.2.