



Mitchum, Mexico and the Good Neighbours Era

Liam White

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Robert Mitchum was one of the most charismatic stars of the 'classic Hollywood' era. His screen persona was the essence of cool: tough but vulnerable, accepting of his fate with languid charm and easy humour. His films have often been seen through the lens of film noir, but they had something else in common too: the characters he played in *Out of the Past*, *The Big Steal*, *His Kind of Woman*, *Second Chance*, *Where Danger Lives*, and *Angel Face* seemed irrevocably drawn to Mexico.

Mitchum's sequence of films south of the border coincided with the advent of the 'golden age' of Mexico's own film industry, a new cinematic wave that drew on serious artistic influences from the muralists to Sergei Eisenstein, and that was led by director Emilio Fernández and cinematographer Gabriel Figueroa whose 1943 film *María Candelaria*, starring former Hollywood siren Dolores del Río, had won a prize at Cannes.

Under the Roosevelt administration's 'Good Neighbour' policy - a wartime effort to court friendly Latin American countries - Hollywood's portrayal of Mexico changed: out went the all-purpose exoticism, where 'south of the border' was a metaphor for the loosening of moral and sexual standards, and in came a more nuanced approach.

In this authoritative study, Liam White encourages us to take a fresh look at how Mitchum's films broke with Hollywood convention in the way they depicted Mexico; how Mexico's own film industry boomed, becoming the first example of 'world cinema' to have an impact on the post-War world; and how its success attracted significant US talent - from John Steinbeck to John Ford - to work on bi-national projects.

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