

Artist: **Raul Guerrero**

Oaxaca, Mexico

Summer, 1965

I'm 19 years old, a college dropout hitchhiking around Mexico and for some reason have ended up in Oaxaca.

The Zocalo is surrounded by huge trees and has a bandstand serving as the center of gravity for the evening promenade, a mass of people circling people. Some in this throng are well dressed others not, some wear shined shoes, huaraches or simply go barefoot, hats no hats, clipped hair, long hair, on and on. Kids run around chasing each other. Zapotec and Mixtec women wear gold and silver, selling trinkets and copper copies of jewelry discovered in ancient burial chambers. All the while la banda plays, waltzes, danzones or revolutionary period marching tunes.

Summer, 1968

My art school girlfriend and I are hitchhiking Mexico and stop in Oaxaca.

From our pension we can hear someone playing an ancient sound on a flute, a tune echoing the images we encountered that day in the ancient city of Monte Albán. Later in the Zocalo we sit on a bench observing the evening events. A man sitting next to us strikes up a conversation and after awhile asks if we would like to have lunch with him and his family. We accept the invitation. The next day we find ourselves in a remote village and eventually locate the adobe house. It has a corrugated tin roof and the dirt floor interior is recently swept and newly sprinkled with water. We have a simple lunch, and then taking me aside asks if we would please take his eldest daughter to the United States. He says poverty is making life difficult and he would like to give her to us.

Autumn, 1984

The bus from Teococuilco comes by at 8:10 AM, on its way to Oaxaca and the market. I get up and prepare for the trip into town to buy painting supplies. I make coffee, shower, dress, and open the bathroom windows overlooking the waterfall and stream running underneath the building. Formerly a wheat mill, it's now my painting studio and home for the next six months. The studio offers a panoramic view of the valley below, the sun is reflecting off of slow moving clouds, and the distant mountains are obscured by a light rain.

The bus finally arrives. It looks circa 1947, is painted bright yellow with blue trim, worn tires are covered in mud and the name *El Llanero Solitario* (The Lone Ranger) is written in Old English script on the side. The bus door opens to the blare of Mexican music. I step up and make eye contact with as many people as possible, and offer a greeting. A few respond, most are asleep as they have been on the road since early morning. The passengers are mostly children, and shawl wrapped women with bundles of goods, they are strongly indigenous looking, probably Zapotec. I blend in as my genetic heritage includes Tarahumara and Yaqui, native groups from Northern Mexico. We head into Oaxaca.