# Amant

English Guide

## Dora García

# *Revolution, fulfill your promise!*

February 5 – April 24, 2022


Image: Demonstrator (Sra. Margarita Robles de Mendoza) in Mexico, 1934; the sign reads: "Revolution, fulfill your promise, emancipate women!" Photo: Casasola, Fototeca Nacional, Mexico City, INAH.

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## Curatorial text

*Revolution, fulfill your promise!* centers on Dora García's two most recent films *Love with Obstacles* (2020) and *If I Could Wish for Something* (2021). Referencing a still ongoing revolution, they reflect on the history of, and influences in contemporary feminism and transfeminism.

Both films focus on the exceptional legacy of Alexandra Kollontai (1872-1952), a Russian author, Marxist feminist, sex activist, political exile, and diplomat. Dora García traces and seeks to comprehend how the ideas Kollontai coined and implemented at the beginning of the 20th century, have been translated and transmitted across the globe, and how they have mutated, disappeared, and reemerged through the different waves of feminisms until today.

*Love with Obstacles* departs from research into the Kollontai files at the Marx-Engels-Lenin Institute in Moscow (now RGASPI) and features four letters, a short science fiction narrative, as well as a handwritten note. The selection highlights the complexity of the real Kollontai in stark contrast to how she was officially portrayed in Russia. In García's film, six women read the documents to further embody Kollontai's story of enthusiasm, disappointment, and faith in the future. *If I Could Wish for Something,* which premieres in the US, starts with an image of a hand-carved present Mexican workers gave Kollontai when she was ambassador in Mexico. The film then segues into present-day Mexican feminisms and transfeminisms, which are part of a new wave of feminism in Latin America that has significantly impacted the public space and discourse. García includes footage of demonstrations captured by activists and cinematographers and edits them against a backdrop that documents the creation of a song by La Bruja de Texcoco, a Mexican trans woman singer who adapts traditional Mexican music and Indigenous languages to the realities of transfeminisms in Mexico. La Bruja's creation is inspired by a German tune from the progressive Weimar Republic period and expresses the revolutionary enthusiasm as well as the melancholy that characterize Kollontai's writing.

Dora García is a Spanish artist who often works with film, performance, and theater. Her work focuses on contemporary history, ethics, and politics. She has created projects for major biennials and her work is included in international museum collections.

Both films are produced by Auguste Orts. With support from Flanders Audiovisual Fund, Kulturrådet Oslo, KUF grant, KHiO Oslo National Academy of the Arts, Garage Field Research, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow, On & For Production and Distribution, Diku Norwegian Artistic Research Program.

**Long Seasons at Géza**
***First Person, Third Person, Same Person***
September 2021 – September 2022

*First Person, Third Person, Same Person* is the first chapter of Amant's screening program and highlights the cinematic work of artists Grada Kilomba, Olivia Plender, Dora García, and Clara Ianni. A common thread throughout the screening program is the weaving together of news, testimonials, memories, documents, diaries, books, and other epistolary documents. This assembling creates a multifaceted, collage-like view of historical facts and resonates with contemporary circumstances. The included films tend to rely on a peripheral narrator or give historical characters the opportunity to address present--day realities, and in doing so impact the viewer at a cognitive as well as an affective level. The result is a semi-fictional reality in which remembering, reflecting, and acting are equally relevant.

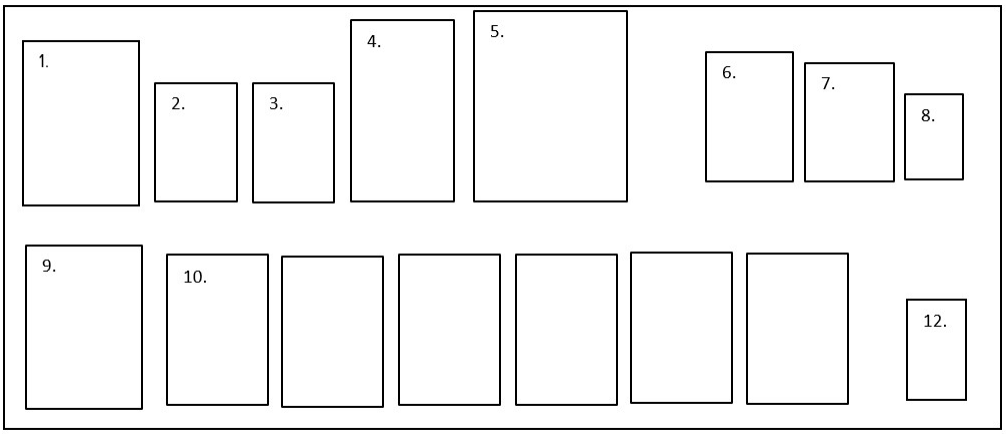
Grada Kilomba
September-November, 2021

Dora Garcia
February-April, 2022

Olivia Plender
April-June, 2022

Clara Ianni
July-August, 2022

**Vitrine 1**




1. Love with Obstacles

Bo Cavefors, an unclassifiable Swedish cultural agitator and agent provocateur, founded his publishing house in 1959 in Lund when he was only 23 years old. The Bo Cavefors Bokförlag introduced the work of Louis Althusser, Roland Barthes, Ernst Jünger, Comte de Lautréamont, Karl Marx, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and, paradoxically, the Swedish fascist Per Engdahl to Swedish readers. Cavefors's work changed Swedish cultural life: he didn't impose any limits on what could be said or printed. His publishing was committed to a militant freedom of expression.

In 1977, only two years after members of the Rote Armee Fraktion (RAF) attacked the West German embassy in Stockholm, Cavefors published a selection of the RAF communiqués and texts in a highly controversial book. Cavefors, who had published more than 700 titles in 20 years, seems to have anticipated that this publication would test the limits of freedom of expression. Indeed, the Swedish cultural establishment would never forgive him for giving a voice to these terrorists. Yet, Cavefors not only produced raf: texte (RAF writers did not use capital letters), but also actively participated in its distribution in France, Italy, and the GDR, as well as in the Federal Republic of Germany. These texts were forbidden in both East and West Germany, and Cavefors smuggled the books into the countries.

In order to do so, Cavefors used a simple tactic: he hid the contents inside a false cover for Kårlek med Förhinder [Love with obstacles] written by the fictional author Per A. Rosenberg. In this way, Cavefors smuggled a political bomb across borders, and German customs officials did not suspect any contraband material beneath the cover of what they assumed was a romantic novel.

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The cover of the publication—light yellow with red cursive letters—also featured a schematic drawing inspired by Édouard Manet. Apparently, Manet was a distant relative of the king of Sweden; his mother, Eugénie-Désirée Fournier, was the daughter of a diplomat and goddaughter of the Swedish crown prince Charles Bernadotte. This seemingly  cover image for an inconsequential romantic novel, was therefore also a latent political attack.

How many dangerous thoughts have been hidden in harmless-looking love stories? Love with Obstacles implies that in the charming path of love's bliss (an efficient trap set by the heteropatriarchy to guarantee the submission of women), some obstacles are to be found.

As I was producing the book Love with Obstacles (2020) on the legacy of Alexandra Kollontai, I was struck by how her militant, revolutionary feminism had suffered the opposite fate. Whereas the raf: texte was smuggled across borders under the pretext of being a harmless romantic novel, Kollontai's influential, borderless, feminist writings have been obscured by, if not entirely dismissed because of, the publication of her novels about female psychology, relationships, sex, and morality. While we may wonder how many dangerous ideas have circulated while being hidden in harmless-looking love stories, it is no less important to consider how revolutionary feminist writings have often been dismissed as mere fiction.

2. *Texte raf*. Rote Armee Fraktion. Lund: Raf, 1978.

3. False Cover for Texte raf: *Karlek med förhinder.* Per A. Rosenberg.

4. *Love with Obstacles*. Kollontai, Alexandra, and García, Dora. Amor Rojo. Berlin: K. Verlag, 2020.

5. Internacional Newsreel Photo and caption. English translation:

A few days ago, Mrs. Alexandra Kollontai, the Ambassador of the Russian Soviet Union in Mexico, made a courtesy visit to President Calles. During this encounter, Mrs. Kollontai, who in addition of being a distinguished diplomat is also a notable novelist, presented to President Calles the plot of her new novel Amor Rojo [Red Love], which will be published soon in the United States. The photo depicts the Ambassador and the President during their conversation.

6. *Love of Worker Bees*. Kollontai, Alexandra. Translated by Cathy Porter: Afterword by Sheila Rowbotham. Virago, 1977.

7. *La Bolchevique Enamorada*. Kollontay, Alexandra. Madrid: Oriente, 1928.

8. *La Bolchevique Enamorada*: *(El Amor En La Rusia Roja).* Manuel Chaves Nogales. Barcelona Asther, 1930.

9. Red Love interview and The Bolshevik in Love books

Is that what you wanted to point out in your story Red Love?

> Please—interrupted Madame Kollontai—don't use this undignified, stupid name Red Love in connection with my novel. Seven Arts did not act fair with me. You know, Russia has no literary convention with the United States, so anyone can translate and publish our books and we neither get a penny for it, nor do we have the right to stop a publication. Seven Arts took out of my book called in Russian Love of the Working Bees (it was published three years ago) a novel called Wassilissa Malyguina, and gave that story a name of vulgar taste: Red Love. What does that mean? And, besides, they published this novel in a very poor and often incorrect translation without signing any contract with me. Red Love has nothing to do with the problems put forth in my book.

This is Alexandra Kollontai speaking to an American interviewer for The World newspaper in 1930. Today, we can read a typewritten transcript (Fig. 1) of the interview in Folder 134/1/169 of the Russian State Archive of Social and Political History (RGASPI).

The wrongly titled novel Red Love was quickly translated into many languages at the time and creating a stir wherever it was published.

During the declining Primo de Rivera dictatorship of Spain, Kollontai's text Wassilissa Malyguina (1928) was translated as La Bolchevique enamorada (The (she)Bolshevik in love, Fig. 2) and had an extraordinary impact. It was part of a climate of curiosity about the cultural landscape following the 1917 Russian Revolution, especially about the changing morals and issues such as free love, divorce, and abortion (which was decriminalized in Russia in 1920—the first country in the world to do so— thanks to the work of, among other women, Kollontai herself). The Soviet Union was at that time a model of what a feminist state could be, with the "most progressive family legislation the world had ever seen."

This new morality was a cause for alarm among the reactionaries and many of the well-educated progressives in Spain. One of the most surprising reactions to the publication of Kollontai's La Bolchevique enamorada was the novelette of the same title by Manuel Chaves Nogales (Fig. 3), published in 1930 by Editorial Asther. Nogales's book was subtitled El amor en la Rusia Roja [Love in red Russia] and opens with the following sentence: "El amor es un prejuicio burgués." [Love is a bourgeois prejudice]. Throughout Chaves Nogales's book, there is no

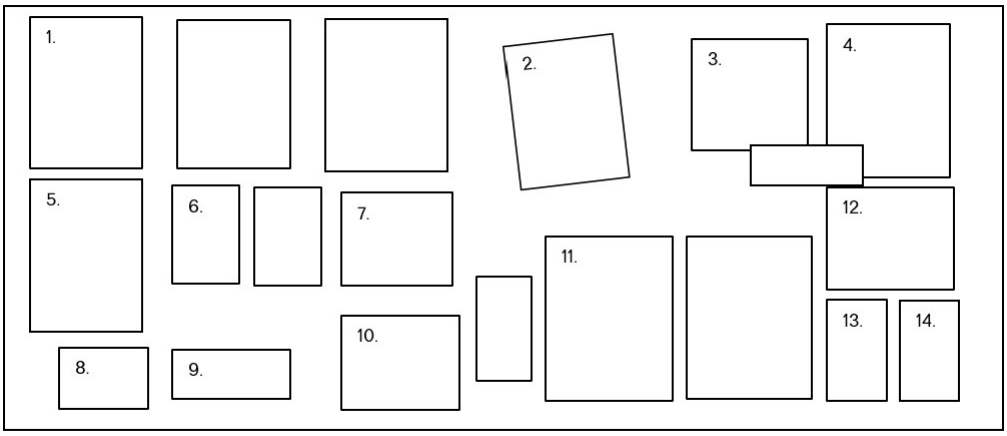
reference whatsoever to Kollontai's novel, the book exudes misogyny through and through—a clear expression of a threatened masculinity. The plot combines elements of several writings by Kollontai: Wassilissa Malyguina (the female communist leader whose lover wants to thrive in the party thanks to their sexual relation), Three Generations (the cruel gap between old and young communists), and Sisters (the prostitute character). There is no doubt that Chaves Nogales had read Kollontai's novels with a lot of attention, used her title, and tried to create a counternarrative to discourage young Spanish women from enjoying their newfound sexual freedom without guilt.

The publication of the works of Kollontai and the feminist awakening in Spain ended completely in 1939 with the victory of the Franco Regime. La Bolchevique enamorada would only be republished in 1978, after the death of the dictator, by La Sal, Edicions de Les Dones [Salt, Women's Editions], a Catalan feminist publishing house that functioned as a cooperative. In a 1979 article published by the newspaper El País about the activities of the new publishing house, Kollontai's novel is described as a "novela rosa"—a romantic novel.

10. Typed Transcript: Alexandra Kollontai speaking to an American interviewer for The World newspaper in 1930.

11. *A Great Love*. Aleksandra Kollontai and Cathy Porter. London: Virago, 1981.

**Vitrine 2**




1. Love letters (Notes by Alexandra Kollontai around 1930, translated from Russian)

I once looked through old papers and letters, and I decided to burn them. There were bundles of letters which I had faithfully kept through many years.

Love letters.

I had kept them during all the years of exile, as if taking care of a good friend. I had saved them through the storms of revolution. And even longer - through all my years of diplomatic work.

But now I was firmly determined to destroy them.

Did they have any historical value?

More psychological (value). But will the future writers of history be interested in the psychological problems and conflicts of our generation? Will the next generation understand what shaped our happiness and our pain?

There were letters from men, who long ago - now it seems centuries ago - gave me so many beautiful names. Passionate letters or despairing letters from those who I had "shamefully" abandoned. Regretful letters from one, who assured me that he still loved me, but no less had to give me up.
Then came a bundle of my own letters. Letters I wrote in pain and despair. Love letters full of ecstasy and happiness. He loves me! … Letters where I tried to ease

the pain, when I ceased to love, and when I tried to wrap it up in tender words. Did it help?

So many letters… Mostly letters I never sent. Some were copies.

Why did I keep them?

I have always had a strange feeling that my life was a mission. And that the way I handled my love affairs once would help other women to sort out their affairs of the heart and psychological complications.

You must not forget that our generation appreciated psychology and believed in the analysis of the soul.

Many of my letters were written at night. In the morning when the sun was shining, the problem did not seem so tragic or so unsolvable.

Maybe it helped to have one's feelings expressed on paper and maybe that way one had sorted out the "love troubles" one had got into. The normal end of my love stories was almost always some trouble.

Before I burned them, I read the letters. Some were magnificent, real, true and strong. Some made me think: this is literature.

Do the young people of today write and receive such letters?

I once talked to a young girl of today about the long letters we used to write to each other during our love conflicts.

Astonished she asked: "How could you waste so much time on writing letters? And you didn't even type them? I would have made it with one or at most two phone calls."

But "private" phones were a luxury that was not within reach for a simple home in the [eighteen hundred] nineties and, by the way, how could you convey by phone a train of thought that took ten pages to write down? It would have sounded like nonsense on the phone. When written on a piece of paper in your own style and with some tears here and there on the paper it reached the roots of the receiver's heart.

I read the letters from my young husband, who could not understand why I wanted to abandon him. Why couldn't I be happy with him? Why did I want to travel and study at the university of Zürich?

# Amant

Letters from the man who became my “big love” and my great romance mixed with many letters I wrote to him. Some to the front during the civil war and the revolution, others from my posts as diplomat….

Was it really me who suffered so immensely for his sake?

Only one bundle of letters would cause me pain to burn. They have no value as psychological documents and they are of no historical value. They don’t come from him, who was the great experience of my life. I don’t think I ever had any deeper feelings for the author of these extremely well written letters. And, still, it is to their author that my memory sends their warmest thoughts.

At that time I was in the middle of a very responsible and exciting work. It was an extraordinarily rich and happy time.

Rich with all kinds of events, but also with results.

And he admired me just because I reached these results. He valued my talent. That was a pleasant feeling.

Not many men could value the intellectual gifts in a woman they loved. They are usually only proud of her, as if she was their legal wife and so they benefited from her talent in the eyes of other people.

I kept all letters from him, who was not my big love. Strangely enough I even kept his first, formal lines—a short letter about a business matter.

And here I had his last letter - a friendly greeting after an intermission of many years.

There was no farewell letter, no break. No drama had separated us. Love had burned out quite normally without any crisis, without pain.

Was that why I was so grateful to him and so unwilling to burn his friendly, encouraging, wise letters?

It began in August.

My heart was badly wounded and empty.

I had just endured a painful love tragedy.

It shall never happen again, I told myself. From now on, all my energy, all my thoughts and feelings will be for my great, new responsible work. My heart is filled with ashes. No more fires of lust.

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I had had enough of them.

That is what I thought.

It was a warm August night. With a touch of autumn. We had been to the theatre together. It was his initiative. I had no time for theatre.

We decided to walk. We talked business. But in the air was this "something" that made me smile and continuously repeat: "What a wonderful night! And look at the stars!"

I had a very light summer hat and the wind played with my short-cropped hair.

"May I carry your hat? Please give it to me."

When a man is willing to relieve you from such a light burden then it means something.

I gave him my hat.

We did not turn to the right, as we should have. We just went on. We had so much to talk about. About what?

I really don't remember. But my whole self-filled with renewal and happiness and the black silhouettes of the trees that lined the streets, the warm August night with its fresh autumn breeze; everything remains clearly engraved somewhere in the convolutions of my brain.

It was past two o'clock when I hurried up to my room.

There was a mirror opposite the door. I stopped to look at myself. I imagined I must have changed, looking different from when I reluctantly left my room to go to a theatre performance, already regretting the hours it stole from my work.

And now I stood here, radiant and smiling.

Did life start anew?

My heart was certainly not a "burnt out heap of ashes" anymore.

2. Kärleksbrev (Love Letter) - Typed Swedish translation of Kollontai's love letter.

3. Translation of Kollontai's writings on Abortion

In folder 134/1/256 of the RGASPI archives (Russian State Archive of Socio-Political History, Moscow) there is a long and laudatory text, handwritten by Kollontai, on the new abortion law approved by the Soviet government under Stalin on the 27th of June 1936.

This new law, as Kollontai revealed in an interview with an unknown journalist, served

> to give women an even greater possibility than before of combining motherhood with an occupation. (...) With this law the Soviet state emphasizes once again its principled position towards motherhood. Motherhood is not a private affair but a natural social function of women. From the first day of the existence of the Soviet state, Soviet legislation has always emphasized the view that women have two primary tasks in the new society: to be active citizens of the state and at the same time not to neglect motherhood. (...) the state must make sure that motherhood is made easier in all possible ways, on the one hand by a broad network of social institutions for child welfare (nurseries, kindergartens, children's colonies, homes for mothers, etc.), on the other hand by state material support for the mother, and finally by detailed legislation that governs the question of child support. The new law of June 27 is really a logical extension of this principle.

However, the interviewer does not give up so easily, insisting that the new law penalizes abortion and therefore is in open conflict with the law Kollontai herself promoted in 1920, legalizing abortions. To this Kollontai responds:

> The law about the *permissibility* of abortions was approved in 1920 in the Soviet Union under the pressure of specific, unfavorable conditions that prevailed in the country at that time. The Civil War was not yet over. Severe economic living conditions prevailed and the main task for the country fighting for its freedom consisted in using all forces for the building of a new social order. Women as active citizens of the state had to take part, even if their maternal duties were thus left behind (...) Thus, under these conditions, the law permitting abortions was approved. Now the population of the Soviet Union is living under completely different, more fortunate conditions.

Kollontai's retraction of her views on abortion were part of efforts she spearheaded in 1930 to win the favor of Stalin, out of conviction or perhaps just because of a healthy preservation instinct regarding herself and her family. However, Kollontai was always consciously focused on the future, and perhaps having in mind future eyes, she attached to her loyal Stalinists view on abortion a little note, dated 3-4 May of a non-specified year, unequivocally stating her happiness to be "among women" when the battle for the depenalization of

abortion was won in 1920, and how Lenin and his wife, Nadezha Krupskaya, supported them.

3rd - 4th of May

Lenin came to the women's department with N.K, when we were discussing a project of Narkomzdrav about the abortions. And he supported us.
This cheered up the activists in the fight against the punishment for abortions. On the sixth lunch at Mellers, breakfast at (?..)

A few days ago, I was at the meeting about abortions. I was happy to be among women. Discussed our laws of the USSR. And I was proud, and wanted to speak, but it was as if the diplomat was muzzled. After the meeting I told, (how?...)

4. Handwritten notes on abortion law.

5. Revolution, fulfill your promise, emancipate women.
   Voting rights for women

Margarita Robles de Mendoza protests in order to demand voting rights for women and to reprimand the revolution for not living up to its promise of women's emancipation. This image is kept in the media library of the INAH (Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Pachuca, Mexico), and dated 1923-1930.

Margarita Robles de Mendoza (1896-1954) was the most persistent Mexican suffragist of the 1930s. She consistently defended women's equal abilities and called for their equal economic, social, and political rights with men. In March 1932, she wrote a letter to the "jefe máximo" Plutarco Elías Calles, arguing that women and men were equally prepared for civic engagement. To dispute the claim that women were naturally more religious (and hence conservative and antipolitical) than men, she asked Calles: "don't you think that one of the reasons women find refuge in religion is for lack of another more powerful, noble interest? In what other social activities do our women find the opportunity to express their personalities? ... We ... pay taxes, helping to sustain the political party in power ... and we have been soldaderas on the battlefield. Why deny us the rights that correspond to these obligations?"

In 1938, she summed up her feminist perspective: "we women were born for a life of citizenship. We have come to share the responsibilities of our country ... we don't want more feminine sectors and divisions based on men and women; we want to work together."

In 1916, during the Mexican Revolution, the very first Feminist Congress of Yucatán met. The women there discussed and demanded equality to responsibly help men build a new Mexican society. Yucatán was the first state to recognize a

woman's right to vote (they did so in 1923). But they were soon forced to resign from any privileges that they were granted. After years of struggle, in 1953, the vote for women in Mexico was granted.

In the United States, the Fourteenth Amendment (1868) defined citizens and voters as male. Since 1878, a women's suffrage amendment was proposed each year in Congress. It was not until 1919, when the suffragist movement had finally gained enough support, that Congress, grateful for women's help during the war, passed the Nineteenth Amendment on June 5. This Amendment became part of the U.S. Constitution on August 18, 1920. It states, "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex." Even though the language suggests otherwise, these voting rights only applied to white US citizens, not to Black or Native American citizens, whose rights were not guaranteed by law until the passing of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The early women's suffrage movement had drawn inspiration from the political egalitarianism of the Haudenosaunee society. Native American women and men were nominally granted the right to vote in 1924 with the passage of the Indian Citizenship Act. Even so, until the 1950s, some states barred Native Americans from voting unless they had adopted the culture and language of American society, relinquished their tribal memberships, or moved to urban areas.

6. Photographs of Margarita Robles de Mendoza (1896-1954).

7. News Article: "Alexandra Kollontai is Appointed Soviet Union Minister to Mexico" (September 8)

8. A woman reads a document during a meeting of the Feminist Revolutionary Party, 1928
   Archivo Casasola, INAH, Mexico City

When Kollontai arrives in Mexico in 1926, there is already a strong movement for the emancipation of women. It is that same year when Kollontai"s novel "Wassilissa Malyguina" is translated into Spanish and published in Argentina in 1926 with the title "El amor de las abejas obreras" [The love of worker bees].

The main women"s associations  in Mexico at the end of the 1920s of last century are: the Liga Orientadora de Acción Femenina (foundcreated in 1927), directed by Elvira Carrillo Puerto; the Bloque Nacional de Mujeres Revolucionarias (foundcreated in 1929), and directed by Florinda Lazos León; and the Partido Feminista Revolucionario, (foundcreated in 1929), directed by, among others, by Edelmira Rojas.

9. Image of a woman reads a document during a metting of the Feminist Revolutionary Party (1928).

10. *If I Could Wish for Something. A Book of Visual and Text Essays.* García, Dora Aalst: Netwerk Aalst, 2021.

11. "Love and Friendship" Typed transcript.

12. Tina Modotti during the investigations into the murder of Julio Antonio Mella 1929
    Mediateca INAH, Mexico City

These photographs were published on January 13, 1929, in the Mexican newspaper Excelsior with the title "Search in the house of Tina".

Alexandra Kollontai was named ambassador to Mexico in 1926 and was active as such between December 1926 and June 1927. It was a short tenure, but it was a key moment for USSR-Mexico relations that coincided with the construction of a national Mexican identity based on the institutionalization of the Mexican Revolution. Although the potential exchange between Alexandra Kollontai and Tina Modotti continues to be the subject of speculations and rumors, it is very likely that the two met in the Soviet embassy in Mexico. Around that time, Tina Modotti officially joined the communist party of Mexico. Kollontai's views on female sexual freedom and the role of women in society and revolution must have impacted Modotti, just as they had influenced many other women of this generation. Alexandra Kollontai brought the films of Sergei Eisenstein to Mexico, and the mutual influence between Eisenstein and Modotti is a consequence of Kollontai's cultural ambassadorship.

Tina Modotti's short life is symptomatic of the difficulties a free woman had to confront at that time, inside and outside of her political engagement. In 1928, Modotti met the Cuban revolutionary hero Julio Antonio Mella. She was walking with him near their house when Mella was gunned down in the street in 1929. The Mexican and Cuban government and police, responsible for the murder in different degrees, cooperated with sensationalist newspapers to characterize the murder as a crime of passion that had been provoked, and perhaps abetted, by Tina's "irregular, promiscuous sex life." Tina was accused of collaborating in the crime and these two images correspond to the search in the house she shared with Mella. As a result of this defamation, Tina was forced to leave Mexico.

13. Images of Tina Modotti during investigations into the murder of Julio Antonio Mella (1929).

14. Same as above.