

## The New York Times

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A woman grieves over her dead boyfriend. A picture of an actress who was hit by a car on Avenida Chapultepec.



1940s into the early '90s, when he retired. His métier was Mexico City's "nota roja," the grisly pages. He shot for pulp magazines and mostly for the newspaper *La Prensa*, making visual sense out of urban mayhem and life's general unpredictability.

These days, when the art world adopts and commodifies everything, Mr. Metinides has become something of a darling as his photographs have made the rounds of museums in Europe and galleries in the United States. Not that he claims to be an artist. But the art is there in his pictures, rough and plain as day.

Sometimes there's compassion too. But not too much, because it might become maudlin. When a dress-maker named Bertha Ibarra García discovered that her estranged husband had taken their daughter to live with him and his lover, she sought out the tallest tree in Chapultepec Park and hanged herself from it, leaving behind a note, saying nobody was to blame, in a handbag slung over her shoulder.

The photograph shows her at a discreet distance (a big difference from Weegee, the American ambulance chaser and celebrity hound, who loved the glare of the flashbulb close-up); the picture stresses the tree, light dappled and in silhouette on a quiet, sunny afternoon. The dead woman does not instantly register. When she does, her head turned as if calmly gazing up into the branches, she looks as if she were out for a Sunday stroll, until you notice the white rope.

We react to these images with curiosity and the unease of identification.

Subtlety is possible even in the most grotesque circumstance. It takes a second to note the emotional punch line in his shot of a young man weeping on the shoulder of an older man in a sombrero. A second young man, dazed, stands stiffly beside them. In the foreground two policemen, one turned away from the camera, the other facing forward and barely inside the picture, frame the main protagonists.

Who knows what's going on? The picture works once you recognize that there's another man barely sandwiched between the dazed one and a policeman. In profile his face is a sliver of open mouth and grimacing eyes. It's cruel to say, but in Mr. Metinides's world his suffering becomes our reward.