

***Daughter of the Dancers / Muchachita!*, Manuel Alvarez Bravo**

Daughter of the Dancers / Muchachita!

Manuel Alvarez Bravo

Mexican, 1933

Gelatin silver print

9 3/16 x 6 5/8 in.

92.XM.23.23

With her back to the camera, a girl in a bright white cotton skirt peers into a circular black hole or window cut into a patterned wall with peeling paint. Her head is all but obscured by a wide-brimmed hat that echoes the shape of the portal. She stands on her toes ever so tentatively, her bare right foot overlapping her left, as if she is trying to create her own stepping stair. Her right hand disappears into the void as she investigates the unseen contents within. This photograph by Manuel Alvarez Bravo establishes a contrast between her innocence and the fearful unknown.



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About the Artist

Manuel Alvarez Bravo (Mexican, 1902–2002)

A self-taught photographer, Manuel Alvarez Bravo purchased his first camera at age twenty while working at a government job. His earliest success at photography came around 1925, when he won first prize in a local photographic competition in Oaxaca. He returned to Mexico City, where he had been born, and in 1927 met Tina Modotti, who introduced him to a lively intellectual and cultural environment of other artists from various disciplines. Among them was Edward Weston, who encouraged Alvarez Bravo to continue photographing; Weston wrote to him in 1929: "Photography is fortunate in having someone with your viewpoint. It is not often I am stimulated to enthusiasm over a group of photographs."

Alvarez Bravo taught photography at the San Carlos Academy in the late 1930s, documented the work of Mexican mural painters including Diego Rivera, and contributed images to the journal *Mexican Folkways*. His primary subject interests have ranged from the nude form to folk art, particularly burial rituals and decorations.

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Questions for Teaching

Using as many details as possible, describe what you see in this image. (In this image, a young girl is seen from the back looking into a circular window. The girl wears a bright white dress, a shawl draped over her shoulders and arms and a hat with a circular brim on her back. The girl wears no shoes and seems to be standing on her toes to peer into the window. The girl is standing in front of a dramatically patterned plaster wall with paint flaking from its surface. Her body casts a distinct shadow on the wall, indicating intense sunlight.)

There is a striking contrast between the intense light outside the building and the total darkness revealed through the window. What might this contrast represent? (This image invites a number of interpretations. Some suggest that the image may be a meditation on innocence: the girl in the white dress representing the innocence of childhood, and the dark interior representing the ending of innocence in the near future. Although we have no idea what the girl sees inside the building, there is a sense that it is something sinister or off-limits. Despite this, the girl gazes with brave curiosity through the window.)

This image expresses many strong formal qualities. Which of the elements and principles of art are most strongly represented here? (There are many repetitions of *shape* in this image. For instance, the shape of the window is reflected in the circular shape of the hat brim. The pattern on the plaster wall also consists of repeated shapes. The *pattern* is a complex arrangement of squares and rectangles. *Value* is also important in this image. The girl's bright white dress is an important contrast to the darkness inside the building. Finally, the arrangement of pattern in the image and the *repetition* of circular shapes create a composition with *balance* and *unity*.)

