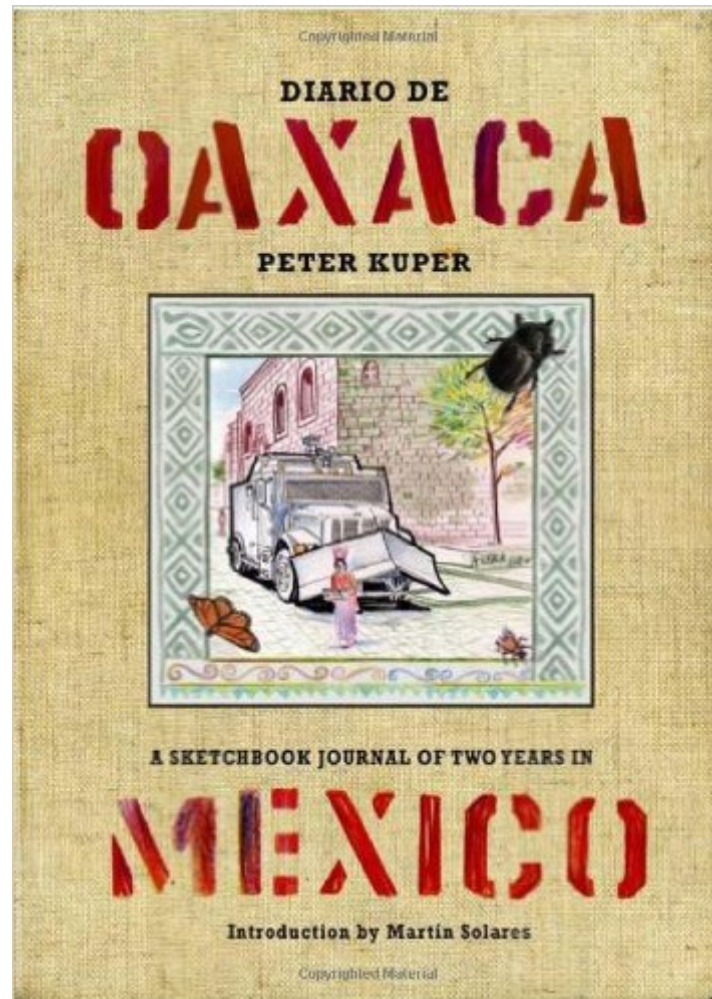


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# Diario De Oaxaca: A Sketchbook Journal Of Two Years In Mexico



## Synopsis

Painting a vivid, personal portrait of a social and political upheaval in Oaxaca, Mexico, this unique memoir employs comics, bilingual essays, photos, and sketches to chronicle the events that unfolded around a teachers' strike and led to a seven-month siege. When award-winning cartoonist Peter Kuper and his wife and daughter moved to the beautiful, 15th-century colonial town of Oaxaca in 2006, they planned to spend a quiet year or two enjoying a different culture and taking a break from the U.S. political climate under the Bush administration. What they hadn't counted on was landing in the epicenter of Mexico's biggest political struggle in recent years. Timely and compelling, this extraordinary firsthand account presents a distinct artistic vision of Oaxacan life, from explorations of the beauty of the environment to graphic portrayals of the fight between strikers and government troops that left more than 20 people dead, including an American journalist Brad Will.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 208 pages

Publisher: PM Press; Bilingual edition (September 1, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1604860715

ISBN-13: 978-1604860719

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 1 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars See all reviews (15 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #880,296 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #52 in Books > Comics & Graphic Novels > Manga > Educational & Nonfiction #801 in Books > History > Americas > Mexico #3057 in Books > History > Americas > Native American

## Customer Reviews

There is a Kurt Vonnegut story where NASA sponsors a poetry contest seeking a poet so the next person to reach a new planet might say something profound. NASA, it seems, was disappointed when an astronaut landed on Mars and said, "this looks just like my driveway back in Houston." *Diario de Oaxaca* brought that story to mind, because history happened in Oaxaca in 2006. There were months of barricades and demonstrations met with lethal force by the police. We are fortunate that the gifted artist Peter Kuper was on the ground to bear witness to these events. Kuper's first-hand account is drawn in the form of simple sketches, but taken as a whole, his diary is a profound and moving document. Don't expect a traditional graphic novel with box after box of

sequential drawings advancing the story. As the subtitle says this is a sketchbook. Mostly pictures, it is perhaps 15% text, and the text is presented in both Spanish and English. This book is being simultaneously published in Mexico, so there is a practical reason for this. The bilingual text, however, also demonstrates Kuper's evident respect for the language and culture of Mexico. While most of the book deals with the city of Oaxaca, not all is turmoil. There are some quirky, quiet days and there are side trips to the beach, the pyramids, small towns, and even the monarch butterfly preserves. One might ask, what is the point of sketchbook journalism in a digital age? I'd suggest seeing the actual marks a person makes alongside their written words offers the reader a special insight. We get the sense that we know Peter Kuper, that we are in the company of a friend, and that our friend is a reliable witness to history. Highly recommended.

I have made a point of reading just about everything that Peter Kuper (Speechless, World War 3 Illustrated) has written and drawn over the last 15 years, so I was surprised to learn that I had missed this book when it first came out in September 2009. But once I discovered my oversight, I quickly resolved it, and I'm glad I did. *Diario de Oaxaca* is an unusual book: part graphic novel, part political treatise, part travelogue, and part art book-slash-sketchbook. The book grew from the two years Kuper and his family lived in Mexico, from July 2006 to June 2007, where they fled to avoid life under the Bush administration, America's consumer culture, and Kuper's own workaholic schedule. But their arrival in Oaxaca City and nearby San Felipe del Agua also coincided with a massive teacher's strike that, in the coming months, would boil over into violence and bloodshed. The book is "told" chronologically, if "told" is the right word, starting with a preface by Kuper, then the first of several sketchbook pages drawn as they arrived in Mexico, along with Kuper's written commentary on the illustrations. (The text throughout the book is presented in both English and Spanish, in a manner similar to most art books.) Although the violence of the teacher's strike is still a couple of months away at this point, the tension can already be felt as early as page 24 when anti-government posters and sign-carrying protesters start showing up in the backgrounds of the scenes Kuper draws. Kuper and his family settle in peacefully, but it doesn't take long before tensions grow. Federal troops show up in October, and Kuper's sketchbooks are suddenly full of soldiers in riot gear, military vehicles, and barricaded streets. Rocks are being thrown (by both sides), vehicles burned, and helicopters flown overhead. On November 2, the first gunshots rang out. Strangely, by the turn of the year 2007, all signs of the protest have been erased. Some of the teachers' demands had been met and they returned to work. Minus a few hundred wounded and arrested protesters, of course. With most of the tension eased, Kuper is able to settle into being an

artist in Oaxaca. He draws the local flora and fauna, the architecture, the Dia de los Muertos skulls that pervade the culture, and the people. The family travels to Mexico City, the ruins at Teotihuacán, and other cities. Meanwhile, the US State Department lifts its ban on travel to Oaxaca, freeing up the local economy. Through it all, Kuper learns to most important skill: how to relax. The rest of the book is full of sketchbook drawings, observations, short comics stories, essays on street art and bugs, and more, all punctuated with Kuper's keen eye and sometimes keener wit. *Diario de Oaxaca* could very well be Kuper's most accomplished work as an artist. Most of his comics work has traditionally been completed with nontraditional materials, like stencils, airbrushes, and collage. Here he eschews most of those techniques and instead turns to ink, watercolors, colored pencils, mixed media, and even photography. It's a vibrant book, as colorful as the culture Kuper is depicting. Around the middle of the book, Kuper writes, "I've discovered that by observing and drawing my surroundings, I'm slowing the passage of time." The same thing happens while reading it. Crack the covers and immerse yourself in another world.-- John R. Platt

An engaging diary of the author's experience in Oaxaca. I read it in anticipation of my own visit to Oaxaca, and it proved to be a nice introduction to the city -- especially as it turned out, by sheer coincidence, I was staying at the same house in which Kuper and his family had lived.

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