

odds and ends

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who have managed to keep independent film-making alive despite the erroneous policies followed in the industry since the mid-seventies, despite the voracity of the producers of "churros" (a term used to denote bad-quality films), who have cornered film distribution and showings, and despite the economic crisis. These people have accumulated both dignity and strength and have attracted young and not so young—producers, they have supported and guided new directors fresh out of school, and they are slowly pushing open the gates to the industry.

The National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM, is about to start a project to make low-cost movies with few characters, based on the problems of life in Mexico City. Three directors are apparently slated to get the project off the ground: Jorge Fons, Felipe Cazals and Paul Leduc.

Leduc has been the firmest bastion for independent 16mm film in Mexico. He refused to enter the established industry even during President Echeverría's government (he must have had his reasons for this). But the same stubbornness that reduced him to marginality and was misunderstood even by many of his own generation, finally payed off with *Frida*. With this film, Leduc proved a point held by independent filmmakers for years: that fine, international quality films are possible on a low budget, dispensing with the headaches caused by the mediocrity, the ostracism and the condescensions the national film industry has fallen into. This, of course, requires a lot of talent and implies having access to the necessary equipment.

Felipe Cazals also broke into independent 16mm films in Echeverría's time, when he made *Canoa* and other films which brought him international recognition. Afterwards, Cazals had to work in advertising and direct commercial films under the orders of others. Yet he somehow managed to continue directing, both within and outside the industry, finding new producers. Both *Luz* and *The Three of Clubs* are proof of this.

Jorge Fons has been one of those most thoroughly thrashed by prevailing film policies, but he has not given in. He has

resorted to documentaries or silence, even, rather than film a "churro."

The films we have reviewed here will either have been completed or will be showing within the next few months, and the UNAM project will be underway. However paradoxical it may seem in the midst of the current economic crisis, Mexican films, as an art form and as a form of Mexican expression, seem to be in the process of taking firm steps down a newly found path. ★

Manuel Sorto .

Exhibits

The Museum of Interventions, a Unique Experience

The National Museum of Interventions is located in the old Churubusco convent. "It wasn't accidental that this site was chosen for the museum," explains its director, Mónica

Cuevas y Lara, "given that this is where Mexico City was defended from the U.S. intervention on August 20, 1847."

The museum was created in order to provide an historical understanding of the nature and significance of the various armed interventions against Mexico throughout the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. As in the rest of Latin America, these events have played an extremely important role in shaping the Mexican national consciousness.

Opened in 1980, the museum seeks to fulfill the same general goals that guide all of the museums sponsored by the National Anthropological and Historical Institute; namely, to rescue, investigate, preserve and disseminate the country's history. As Cuevas explains, the museum does not restrict its efforts to any one historical period, but rather deals with the whole of the country's history. The permanent exhibit begins with an introductory hall in which the last days of the colony and the first days of independence are reconstructed. That is intended to set the stage, "to provide an historical framework and a general context."

Next, it continues with displays regarding armed interventions as such. They begin with the last Spanish attempt to reconquer Mexico in 1819, the first French intervention in 1838 (popularly known as the "pastry war") and the U.S. intervention in 1847. Following on their heels were the French interventions in 1862 and 1867, and



The front of the Museum of Interventions

finally, the U.S. intervention in 1914.

According to the director, "the idea is that in the permanent exhibit we develop the concept of armed intervention, while in our other activities we can be more open... that is, we deal with issues such as economic, ideological, and cultural intervention." Nonetheless, the museum is not a heterogeneous cultural center. It takes care so that all of its activities are related to the question of intervention.

"Within the next few years, we hope to strengthen some of the areas in which the museum is still weak. For example, we hope to recover and to project in our exhibits the popular nature of resistance and to integrate elements of the traditionally striking participation of women," explains Mónica Cuevas. She adds that she has always believed that Latin American museums should play an educational role, given the serious shortage of other educational possibilities (the lack of adequate schools, rampant illiteracy, etc.) in the region.

In addition to its permanent exhibit, the museum sponsors a variety of activities. Noteworthy among them is the program known as the "Topic of the Month." A small display is developed regarding some topic related to a significant date of that month. Handouts are also prepared to provide more information and as an additional teaching aid, and experts are often invited in to give special lectures on the topic.

The museum also presents temporary exhibits that develop issues more fully than what can be done in the monthly programs. The temporary exhibits have been so successful that some, like "Womens' Participation in the Popular Resistance," have later been shown at other institutions or have even been developed into smaller, mobile displays that travel around the country.

Another of the museums' programs goes by the name of "artistic-cultural activities." These seek to promote the recovery of nationalist traditions. Recently, for example, the museum sponsored an activity called, "The Songbook of the French Intervention." A variety of numbers were per-

formed, and after each one, the context in which it was written was explained.

The museum also gives summer courses. Last year, some sixty children between the ages of nine and twelve participated in the program. "This year," says Mónica Cuevas, "we'll have the children write and perform skits about the interventions that are dealt with in the permanent exhibit...The course is called 'History Lives,' and the idea is that children will visit the halls, become sensitized to the issue, work with their hands; we'll be giving them historical background and help them to set the stage regarding daily life in the period they'll be studying."

The museum provides a variety of other services to the public as well. There is small photo archive that can be lent to any institution that makes a request. And a documentation center is being set up to serve investigators, students and the general public.

As the Director tells the story, when the museum was first established, the U.S. ambassador at that time complained that the museum had an "anti-U.S. spirit." "But that is simply not true," says Mónica Cuevas, "the museum shows our history...and we have always distinguished between the government of the U.S and the people of the U.S." It is also important to add that the museum places an equally strong emphasis on the French interventions.

One of the museums' major objectives is to have the public understand that Latin America's history and the history of the Mexican people are really one and the same. While it is true that Mexico, because of its specific conditions and development, has maintained a foreign policy based on the principles of non-intervention and the right to a nation's self-determination, the underlying conditions that have made Mexico the victim of interventions throughout its history are conditions that are also shared by the rest of Latin America. ★

José Francisco Ramirez



Photo by Renzo Gastoli.

Interior of the colonial building that houses the Museum

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