

# Yucatan Atheneum Museum of Contemporary Art

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**O**n April 29, 1994, the MACAY (Yucatan Atheneum Museum of Contemporary Art), the youngest museum in the oldest part of Mesoamerica, opened its doors to the public. Housed in a building of great cultural and historical significance, it grew out of the combined efforts of the Yucatecan community as well as other interested parties who over the years have insisted on the need to create a museum in the Yucatan dedicated to the fine arts.

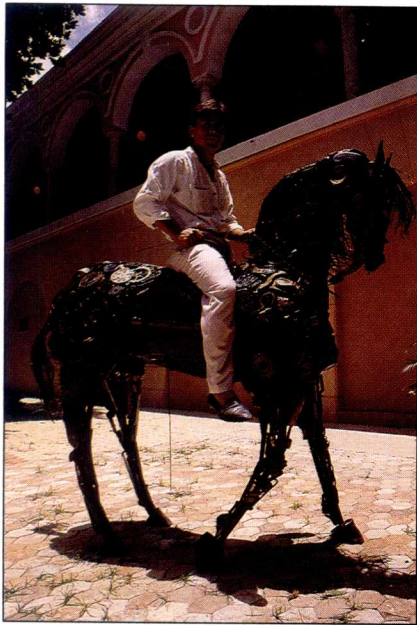
As the project began to develop, considerable emphasis was placed on the importance of finding an appropriate space for the museum. The building chosen was Mérida's well-known "Ateneo Peninsular" (Peninsular Atheneum building). Although the structure itself dates back to the beginning of the Spanish Conquest, it is best remembered as the seminary attached to the Cathedral of Mérida, dedicated to San Ildefonso.

With the passing of time, the building was separated from the cathedral and converted into one of the first cultural institutions of the Yucatan Peninsula: the College of San Ildefonso, whose entrance—adorned by beautiful Colonial-style sculpture dedicated to the saints—

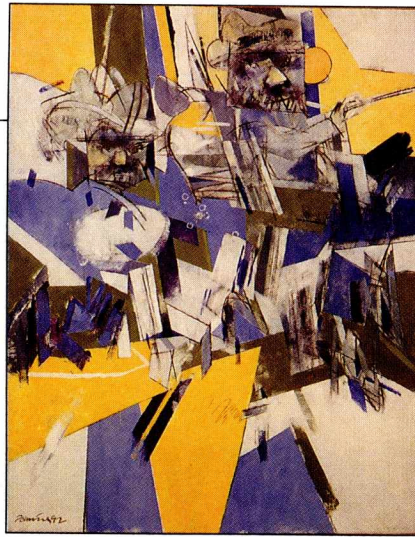


\* Director of the Museum.





Adolfo Cuellar riding on his metal horse.

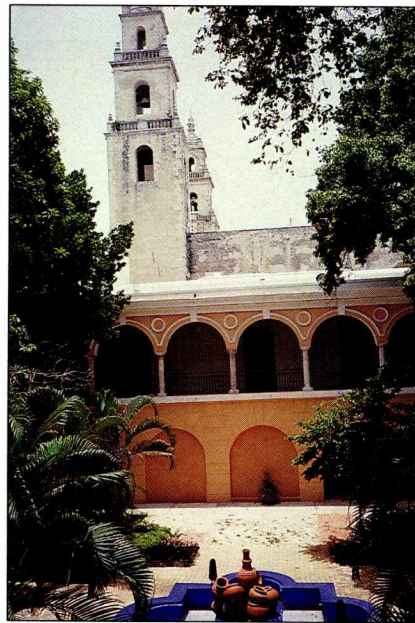


Gabriel Ramírez Aznar, *Mid-day workshop*, acrylic.



Adolfo Cuellar, *Owl*.

Photos by Gunilla Hallgren.



The museum's patio.



Fernando Castro Pacheco, *Woman's head*, oil.

Dish by Martín Coronel.



Temporary exhibition of Yucatecan embroidery by Silvia Terán.





Works by Martín Coronel (loan from INBAL).

can still be admired today on Mérida's 58th Street.

Over the years, the building underwent many changes and amplifications, the most significant of which were done at the beginning of the 20th century. The structure, when completed in 1916, exemplified the "Frenchified" Renaissance style common at the time, decorated with military emblems, large votive lanterns and a pair of large angel-like figures with the words "Ateneo Peninsular" inscribed at their feet.

A product of the inspiration and cultural interest of General Alvarado, one of the most progressive government officials in the Yucatan during this time, the "Ateneo Peninsular" was created to make culture and education available to everyone. It was the general's hope that contact with these elements would help people to elevate themselves socially.



Fernando García Ponce hall.

Unfortunately, as time passed, the good intentions of General Alvarado were lost and the building was occupied by a series of public offices—a heterogeneous mix of government institutions having nothing to do with the arts. Through daily and indiscriminate use, the building soon began to deteriorate.

In 1991, after the building had been virtually destroyed, the idea of using it for its original purpose surfaced again. And so the rescue process began. Slowly, the government offices began to disappear and the restoration of the building progressed. In 1993, after two years of hard work, the reconstruction was finished and the first steps toward the installation of the museum commenced. At the end of the same year, the government and a small group of private patrons—known as the MACAY Cultural Foundation, headed by Carlos García Ponce—joined forces to begin planning the museum's future.

On January 31, 1994, the Yucatan state government handed the building over to the MACAY Cultural Foundation, which was placed in charge of the museum's administration.

At present, the MACAY—which has 10,500 square feet of usable space—consists of 15 exhibition halls, of which eleven are open to the public. Five of the halls house permanent exhibitions, while the remainder are for temporary ones. Entering from the Pasaje de la Revolución (between 58th and 60th Streets), the visitor finds him or herself in the vestibule, a small area dedicated to the sale of museum paraphernalia—books, catalogues, T-shirts, posters, key chains, pens, etc., as well as the MACAY bulletin, a magazine published by the museum every three months.

Leaving the lobby, one enters a patio where a blue fountain filled with large clay pots is surrounded by a

series of beautiful fruit trees, typical of the region.

To the left are two temporary exhibition halls, the museum workshop and another patio, soon to be the museum's exposition forum. The latter, a large space that can easily be adapted to the museum's needs, will be used for all kinds of cultural events, including sculpture exhibits, concerts, theater and dance performances, as well as any other activities the museum may offer. In the future, the area will be roofed over, allowing for the installation of a screening room and the use of the space for other indoor activities.

On the left side of the first patio, visitors enter the museum's second



Juan O'Gorman, outline for mural at Chapultepec Castle (loan from Fomento Cultural Banamex).

floor by means of a majestic double staircase, which will soon display one of the most important murals painted by Yucatecan painter Fernando García Ponce.

At the top of the stairs to the left is the "multi-use" room, designed for workshops, courses in art appreciation and the basics of drawing, painting, ceramics and theater, as well as the reception of school groups.

The halls in this area run from left to right around the building in the shape of a big, inverted "J." Those who are interested can peruse the museum's art library, with a collection of over 1,300 books specializing in fine art, architecture and crafts M