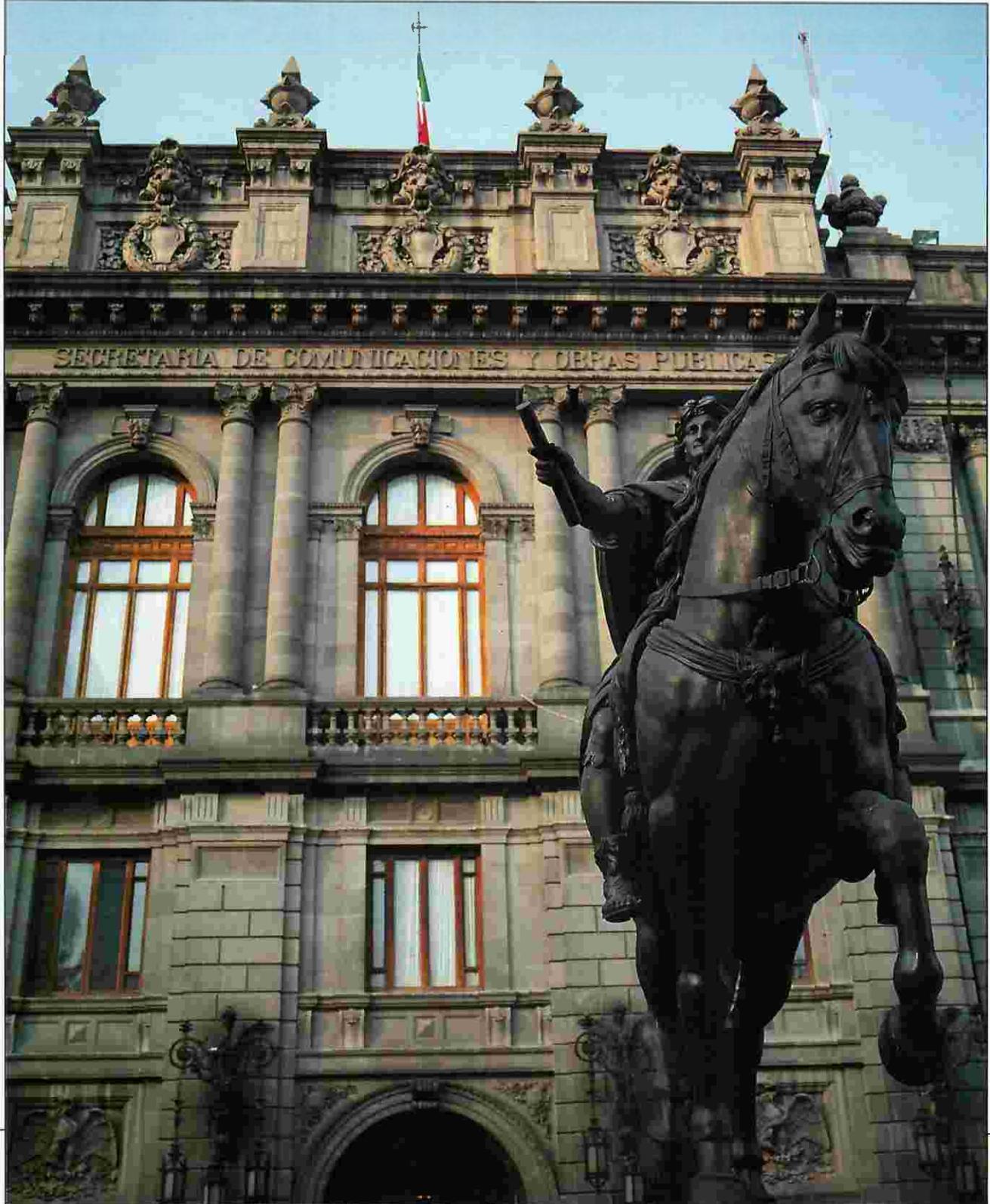


# The National Art Museum

*María Luisa López Vieyra\**

*Front view of the museum.*



**T**he necessity of having a grand art collection which would bring together the aesthetic accomplishments of Mexico's art history led to the creation of the National Museum of Art (Munal), at the beginning of the 1980s. The museum is part of the National Institute of Fine Arts.

A presidential accord published in the *Diario Oficial de la Federación* on June 18, 1982, crystallized a proposal put forward by the country's intellectuals. Among the fundamental considerations which led to the foundation of this museum was the fact that it would be indispensable "...to have a museum which gathers, preserves and exhibits significant and important works of art...as a means to strengthen national identity."

#### The collection

Located in Mexico City's Historic Center, the National Museum of Art safeguards what are considered to be the nation's most important works of art. With 24 permanent exhibition halls, visitors are offered many diverse works of art such as: paintings, sculptures, graphics, handicrafts, photography and documental material, from the 16th century up to the 1950s. Special emphasis is placed on the period from the foundation of the Academy of San Carlos to the culmination of the Mexican School of Painting.

The permanent exhibition offers examples of the Renaissance, Mannerist and Baroque paintings of New Spain from the 16th and 17th centuries, with works of the painters Echave, Xuárez, Miguel Cabrera and

Juan Correa. The Academy of San Carlos is represented by works from its first period (1781-1821), which includes the works of the sculptors José María Labastida and Pedro Patiño Ixtolinque and their ideas about emancipation. The museum also displays the outstanding artwork of Manuel Vilar and Pelegrín Clavé from the Academy's second period.

The evolution of landscape painting is depicted, from the middle of last century with the figure of José María Velasco up to the appearance of art that abruptly turned towards Realism and the folkloric painting which was cultivated in the last third of the 19th century. The halls dedicated to Symbolism demonstrate how this tendency prevailed at the end of the century, with outstanding artists such as the sculptor Jesús F. Contreras and the painter Julio Ruelas.

The halls dedicated to the 20th century give an account of the influence of the European vanguard with works by Alfredo Ramos Martínez and Adolfo Best Maugard, as well as the easel painting of the muralists Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros.

The end of the tour includes exhibits from the Open Air Schools of Painting, and the formation of the Mexican School and the Workshop of Popular Graphics. The 1940s exhibit refers to international Abstractionism, which was reflected by the artists Rufino Tamayo and Carlos Mérida, at the same time explaining the diversification of the artistic panorama resulting from the gradual transformation of the country's social conditions.

#### The building

Since its inauguration on July 23, 1982, the National Museum of Art

has been located in the old Palace of Communications. That building was constructed by the Italian architect Silvio Contri in the era of the Porfirio Díaz government. The building's iron structure was designed in accordance with rationalist ideals fashionable in Europe at that time.

The construction of the Palace of Communications began in 1904. It is composed of three wings and four facades covered with stone from the Tlaxcaltecan banks of San Martín Xalcotan. On the main facade, Contri combined Florentine Renaissance and Classic French styles. There are three exceptional entryways with ornate ironwork doors. The doors were made in the workshops of the Sociedad Anónima del Pignone in Florence.

The Pignone Company was contracted to produce the architectural stone ornamentation, ornamental ironwork and interior decoration. In turn, the Pignone Company contracted the services of Mariano Coppedé and Sons, a renowned family of Italian artists. The paintings on the ceilings, stairway and the Reception Hall allude to the mottos of the Porfirio Díaz government and were painted by Cario Coppedé. The first represents an allegory of peace, while the second refers to progress based on science, liberty, history, work and art.

The National Museum of Art recognizes two main components in its process of communication: the work and the public. With the goal of communication in mind, it receives, generates, processes and provides information in order to produce cognitive and aesthetic answers for the visitor. ❧

\* Administrator of Educational Services at the National Art Museum.



*Central staircase.*

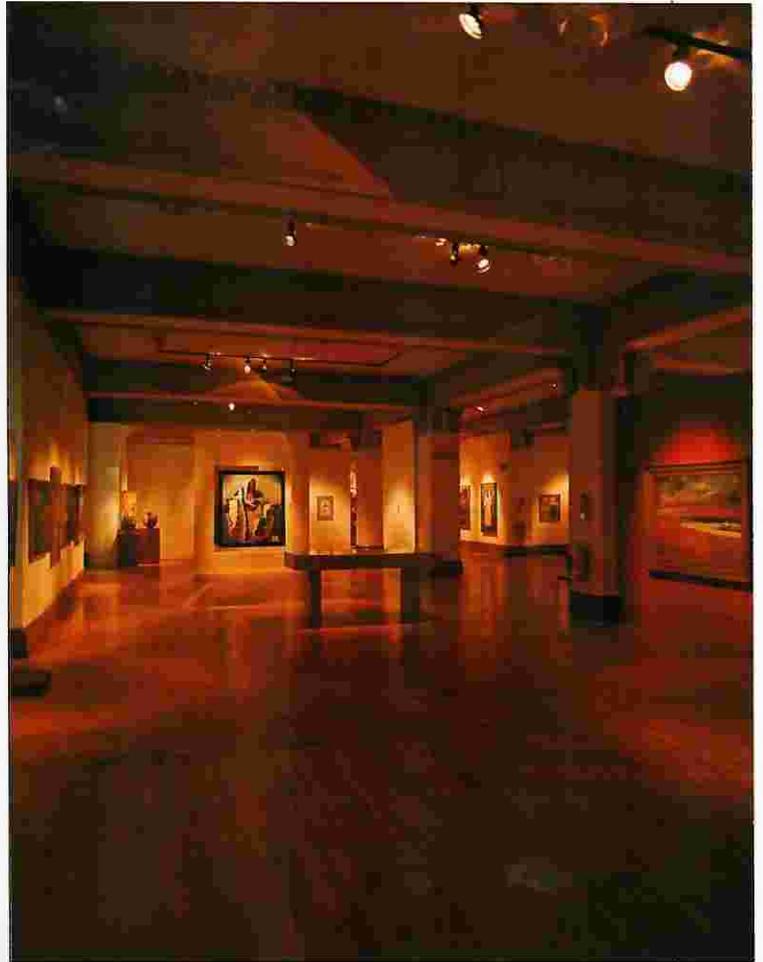
*Detail of ceiling.*



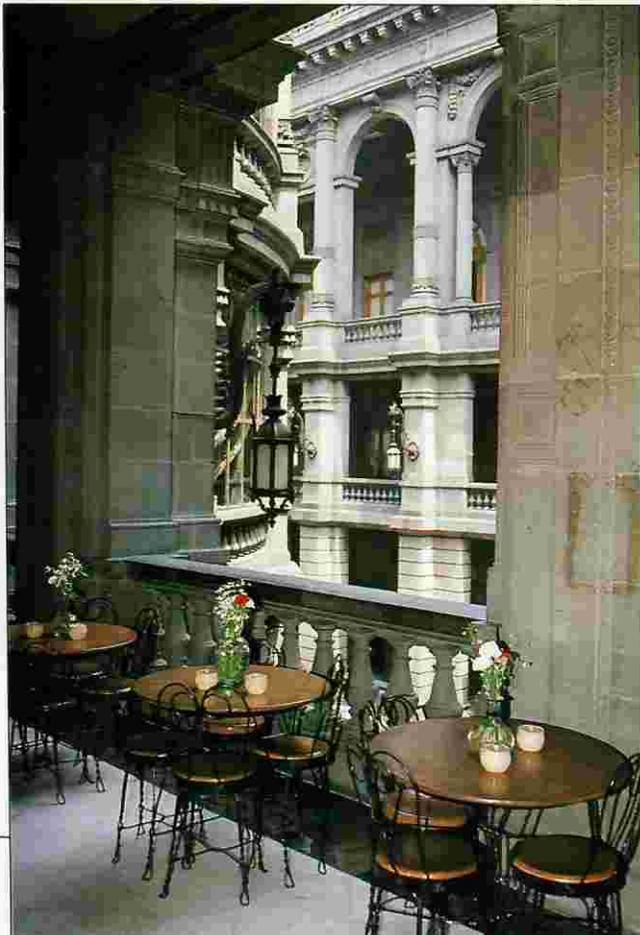
*Another view  
of ceiling.*



*Exhibition hall.*



*Exhibition hall.*



*The museum cafe*

Photos by Arturo Piera.