

MEXICO CITY'S MODERN ART MUSEUM

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Mexico City's Modern Art Museum (MAM) is in Chapultepec Forest, near the Monument to the Child Heroes, with its main entrance facing the intersection of Paseo de la Reforma and Gandhi streets. The design of the museum, by architects Pedro Ramírez Vázquez and Rafael Mijares, is an example of 1960s functionalism. The museum has two buildings; the main one has four exhibition halls,

* Ph.D. in philosophy and art historian.

while the other holds the gallery. The steel construction allowed for the creation of large spaces and simple forms. The transparent fiberglass and polyester resin domes in the middle of each building surprise the visitor with both their visual and acoustic effects. The materials—marble, quarried stone and rock—contrast with the transparency of the glass which permit a view of the sculpture garden and make illumination of the exhibition rooms a mixture of natural and artificial light.

The Modern Art Museum is a public museum, inaugurated September 20, 1964, under the administration of Adolfo López Mateos, president from 1958 to 1964. A forerunner of the MAM was the National Museum of Modern Art, located in the Fine Arts Palace between 1957 and 1960, when Miguel Salas Anzures was the head of the Visual Arts Department. The museum's collection comes from the national collection of the National Museum of Visual Arts, while the international collection was formed by dona-

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tions. It includes modern and contemporary painting, graphics, sculpture and photography.

The Xavier Villarrutia and Carlos Pellicer rooms house the permanent collection. Arranged chronologically, the first room offers the viewer a look at work from the so-called Mexican School of Painting

and Sculpture. Paintings by the major figures of Mexican muralism¹ predominate: for example, *El diablo en la iglesia* (The Devil in the Church) (1947), by Chihuahua-born David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896-1974); *Culto a Huichilobos* (Cult to Huichilobos) (1949), by the Jalisco-born José Clemente Orozco; and *Retrato de Lupe Marín* (Portrait of Lupe Marín) (1938), by Guanajuato-born Diego Rivera.

Work by other artists from the same period who were not part of the current which came out of the Mexican School is also shown as part of the permanent collection. Among them are Manuel González Serrano (1917-1960), Antonio Ruiz (*El Corzo*) (1895-1964) and Agustín Lazo (1896-1971). From among the second and third generation muralists, there are works of José Chávez Morado (b.1909), Jorge González Camarena (1908-1980) and Juan O’Gorman (1905-1982). Examples of Realism, Surrealism and Fantastic Art include *Maternidad* (Maternity) (1943), by María Izquierdo (1902-1955); the famous *Las dos Fridas* (The Two Fridas) (1939) by Frida Kahlo (1907-1954); and *La huida* (The Flight) (1961), by Remedios Varo (1908-1963).



The Flight (1961), Remedios Varo.

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¹ An artistic movement from 1922 to 1940. Muralism “attempted to validate pre-Columbian and folk art, and spread socialist ideas and nationalist ideals, which would later resist Americanization.” Juan Acha, “Perfil Socio-cultural del Museo de Arte Moderno en México,” in *Museo de Arte Moderno. 25 años. 1964-1989*, Mexico, Prisma Editorial, 1989, p. 24.

The work of Rufino Tamayo (1899-1991) stands out in the Carlos Pellicer room, which shows paintings of his from different periods, among them *Las músicas dormidas* (The Sleeping Women Musicians) (1950), *Olga, retrato dinámico* (Olga, a Dynamic Portrait) (1958) and *Hombre a la puerta* (A Man at the Door) (1980). This room shows paintings and sculptures which take in the so-called “generation of the break,” with its beginnings in the 1960s.² Represented are Ricardo Martínez (b.1918), with *El brujo* (The Warlock) (1971); Francisco Corzas (1936-1983), with *La empaquetada* (The Packed Woman) (1966); and Vicente Rojo (b.1932), with *La gran señal* (The Great Signal) (1966). From the tendency of fantasy-art, dating from after 1960, the museum has such important works as *Lagarto* (*Animal fantástico*) (Lizard [Fantastic Animal]) or *La función del mago* (The Magician’s Performance) (1972), by Oaxaca-born Francisco Toledo (b.1940), among others.

Temporary exhibits are usually housed in the José Juan Tablada and Antonieta Rivas Mercado rooms

² Rita Eder describes the “movement of the break” as a questioning of the ideas of muralism and other aspects of the Mexican School of Painting. The artists of this trend called for “subjective expression free from content, as opposed to the social and political character of muralism.” Rita Eder, “La ruptura con el muralismo y la pintura mexicana en los años cincuenta,” in *Historia del arte mexicano. Arte contemporáneo III*, Mexico, Salvat Mexicana de Ediciones, S.A. de C.V., 1982, p. 2201.

and the Fernando Gamboa gallery. Since its inauguration, the museum has had 548 exhibitions which reflect the focus and personality of its nine directors. The showings organized by Fernando Gamboa, the museum’s second director (the first was Carmen Barrera) from 1972 to 1981, who emphasized international exhibits, usually of groups, deserve mention.³ Gamboa argued for this type of showing by pointing to the inability of both Mexican artists and the general public to travel.⁴

³ He organized more than 49 group exhibits (more than 60 percent of which were from abroad) and 168 individual showings (65 percent of which were of Mexican artists). See Acha, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

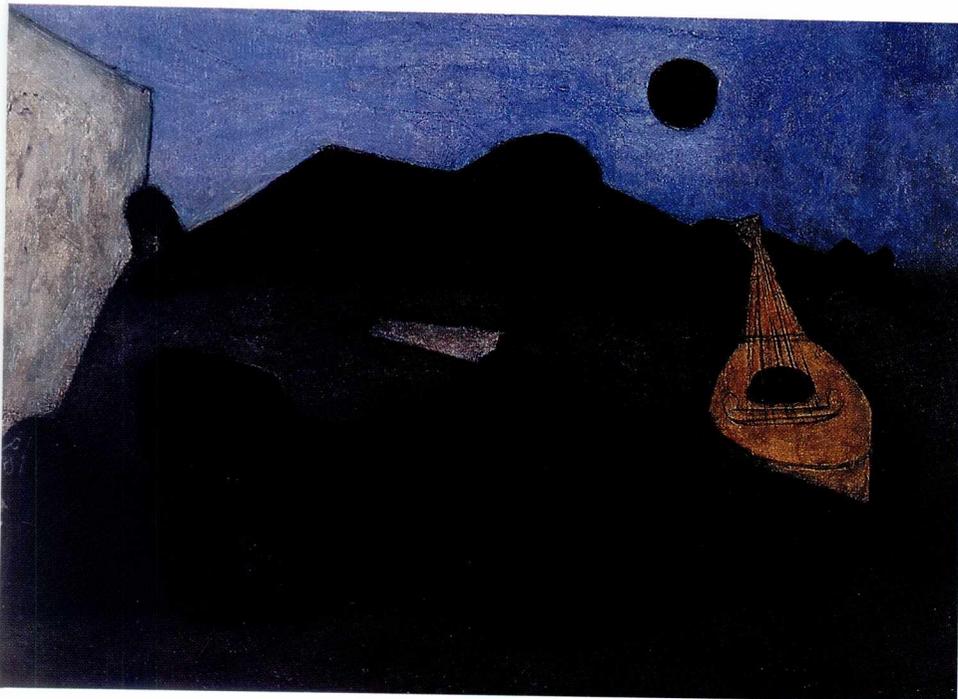
⁴ See Mariana Frenk-Westheim, “La colección de arte de Fernando Gamboa,” in *Recordando a Fernando Gamboa* (catalogue), Mexico, INBA, p. 11.



Portrait of Lupe Marín (1938),
Diego Rivera.



Cult to Huichilobos (1949), José Clemente Orozco.



The Sleeping Women Musicians (1950), Rufino Tamayo.

The museum's collection includes modern and contemporary painting, graphics, sculpture and photography.

Among the most spectacular international exhibitions that Gamboa organized are *The Horses of San Marcos, Venice* (1980), *Henri Cartier Bresson* (1982) and *Henry Moore* (1983). Under the tutelage of Helen Escobedo, head of the museum from 1982 to 1984, special circumstances meant that group showings, retrospectives of living artists and individual showings of dead artists set the tone.⁵ As director of the MAM from 1990 on, Teresa del Conde has been able to bring world-class exhibits from abroad like *Giacomo Manzú* (1991-1992) and *Giorgio de Chirico* (1993-1994).

One of her main goals is publicizing the work of new generations of artists, for whom she periodically organizes collective showings like *Encuentros. De la historia*

del arte en el arte contemporáneo mexicano (Encounters. On the History of Art in Contemporary Mexican Art) (1992). Of all the exhibitions, homages and retrospectives, particularly outstanding were *Manuel Álvarez Bravo. Los años decisivos, 1925-1945* (Manuel Álvarez Bravo. The Decisive Years) (1992) and *Remedios Varo* (1994). From among contemporary Mexican artists, the individual showings *Irma Palacios. Espejismo mineral* (Irma Palacios. Mineral Mirage) (1993) and *Arturo Rivera. Bodas del cielo y del infierno* (Arturo Rivera. Weddings of Heaven and Hell) (1995) have been especially stimulating.

The museum has book, photo and slide libraries as well as a reading-room for internal use open to the public upon presentation of valid identification. The ground floor of the main building has a bookstore which sells exhibit catalogues, art books and other items. MAM also offers services like lectures, round table discussions, book presentations, courses, workshops and special events. The Educational Services Department offers regular guided tours. ❧

The museum is open Tuesday to Sunday, from 10 A.M. to 5:30 P.M. For more information, call (52 5) 553-6233 or 211-8729. Fax (52 5) 553-6211.

⁵ See Juan Acha, *op. cit.*, p. 33.