

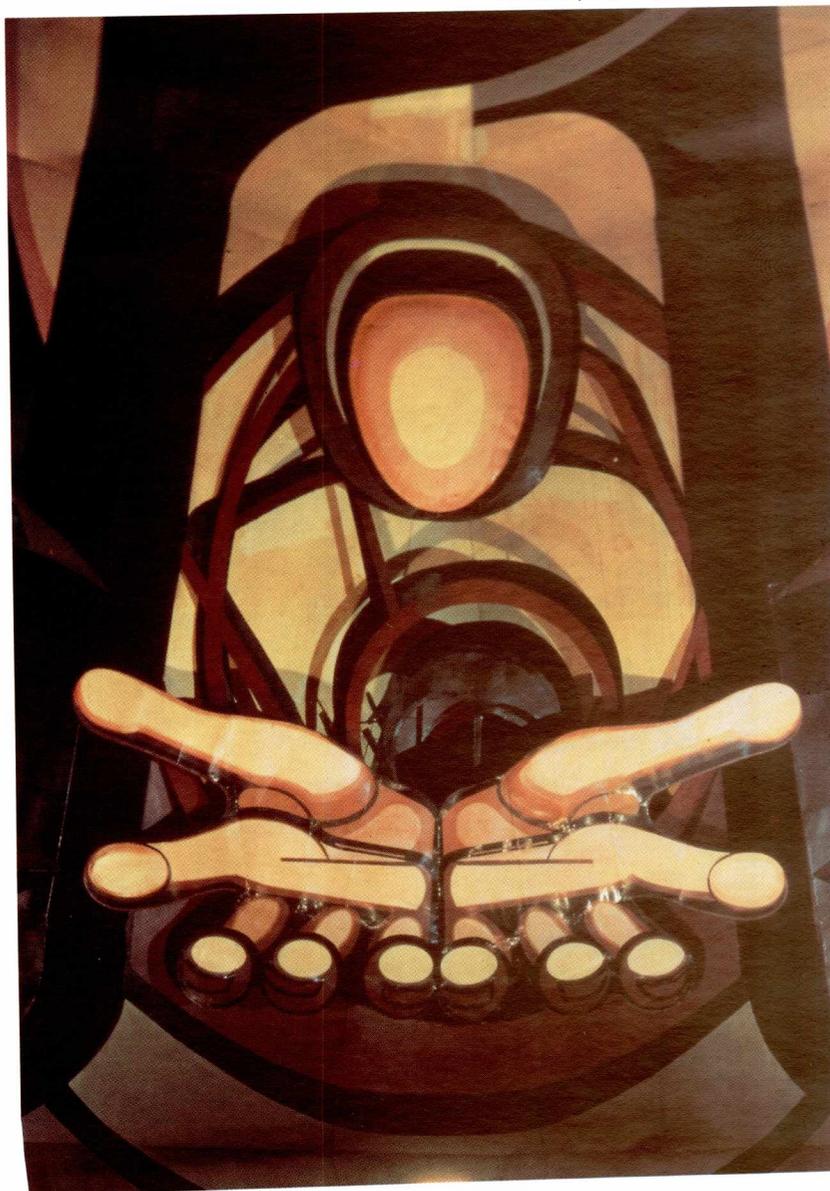
THE SIQUEIROS POLYFORUM

A Diamond of Steel, Light and Color

The March of Humanity is not on a single plane, but a march upward, to the left, to the right, downward, in every direction, always moving. This is the biggest virtue of human beings: moving, going everywhere, not stopping for anything.... It is the total march for the possibilities of today throughout history.

DAVID ALFARO SIQUEIROS

Photos: Polyforum Siqueiros



Woman's hands seeking peace and harmony, from *The March of Humanity*.

The structure of the Polyforum suggests a diamond mounted on a steel setting. Since its founding 25 years ago, it has been both a meeting place and landmark for inhabitants of Mexico's capital and a magnificent example of the country's visual arts vanguard. This center of culture is unmistakable because of its architecture, the murals that cover the twelve sides of its outer walls and the fact that it contains the world's largest sculpted mural, *The March of Humanity on Earth and Toward the Cosmos* by renowned Mexican muralist David Alfaro Siqueiros.

The building became part of one of the most ambitious urban projects at the end of the 1960s, Mexico 2000, intended to modernize Mexico City's image

Its architecture is unique: a double geometric structure, 12-sided on the outside and octagonal on the inside. Viewed from any angle, this octagon looks like an ellipse, an illusion created by the original perspective conceived by Siqueiros for his interior mural.

Another of its unique characteristics is its four different interior levels, which make the utilization of space very versatile. The first level is multi-purpose and houses the offices. The second level contains a circular theater which seats 600 and can be used for lectures, seminars, small concerts and other cultural events.

On the third level is what is called the National Forum: two galleries for temporary exhibits which skirt the balcony above the circular theater.

Today, this forum is used mainly for temporary



Siqueiros' model for the Polyforum ceiling.

and promote tourism on a large scale combining art, architectural beauty and maximum efficiency in all its services.

A Unique Place

The Polyforum was begun with the organization of a workshop and the establishment of a team of painters, sculptors, architects, chemists, photographers, workers and artists invited from different parts of the world. After six years of uninterrupted work, it was inaugurated in 1971 by then-President Luis Echeverría Álvarez.

porary exhibitions of the work of different contemporary artists.

On the fourth level is the Universal Forum, the walls and dome of which are completely covered by the world's largest mural. Under the dome there is a rotating platform which can hold 1,000 people, thus allowing the audience to "march" together with humanity through its history and toward the cosmos. It had a light and sound system which described the different stages of *The March of Humanity* just as Siqueiros himself conceived them. The Forum's current management plans to revive this light and sound show.

A Splendid Example of Artistic Integration

With more than 8,000 square meters of space to unleash his creative capabilities upon, with no major restrictions and accompanied by an excellent team of more than 40 people, Siqueiros encountered in the Polyforum the best opportunity in his life as an artist.

From the start, the main goal of both the artist and his team was to achieve a total integration of architecture, sculpture and painting. This was the time when muralism was searching for a new pictorial language, which would receive a great innovative impetus thanks to its merger with modern architecture and contemporary art. Siqueiros represents that new thinking in muralism, which departed from flat walls and imagined all surfaces as an active, dynamic space. Untir-

Siqueiros' model for the Polyforum roof.

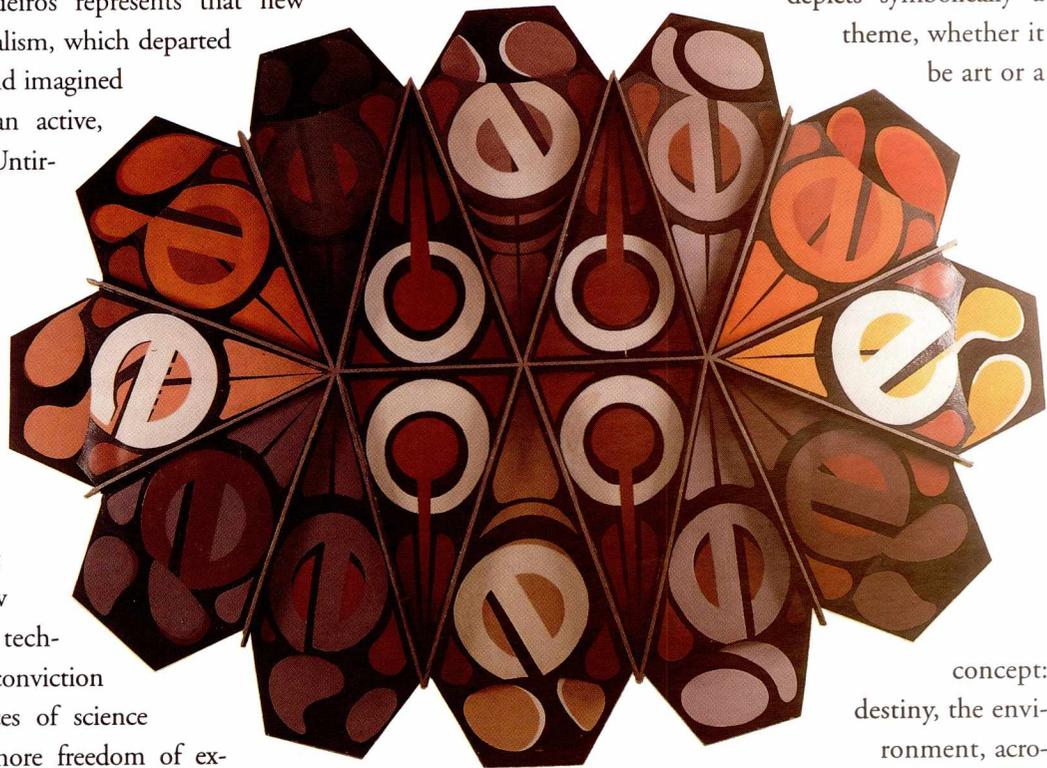
ingly experimental, the artist incorporated new materials and techniques with the conviction that the advances of science would permit more freedom of expression. The result is a work of art which encompasses architecture, painting, sculpture and relief.

Siqueiros also shaped his personal vision of the historic moment that humanity was living through toward the end of the 1960s, when Man had one foot on the Moon. "Realizing that today we are a tiny point within a tiny point in space seems to me to change the

whole poetic, musical and visual sense of human creation.... Today, everything needs size the way it never did before. Now we know that we can march in incredible ways.... We are the happiest [beings] of all human history because we are no longer stuck exclusively on the Earth: we can fly; we can travel the universe."

The Murals of Siqueiros

The exterior of the Polyforum is actually an enormous easel with 12 masterpieces on it. Each one consists of 160 square meters of sculpted painting and depicts symbolically a theme, whether it be art or a



concept: destiny, the environment, acrobatics, the masses, the Decalogue, Christ, that which is native, dance, mythology, mixed blood, music and the atom.

Untiringly experimental, Siqueiros incorporated new materials and techniques with the conviction that the advances of science would permit more freedom of expression.

The very size of the interior mural, known as *The March of Humanity*—more than 2,400 square meters—is a surprise, as is the richness of its form and color, and above all the extraordinary way the painter manages to communicate his conception of a permanent struggle by Man to overcome all negative forces.

The mural depicts the opening of a dome on one side and its closing at nightfall on the other. At opposite ends, two gigantic pairs of hands symbolize Man—in his desire to dominate and create—and Woman—in her search for peace and harmony.

The march begins with the sudden clash of Man with a violent and hostile world. Violence—the power of Man to inflict terrible suffering on his fellows—is the leitmotif of the history which runs through the entire mural. But the other recurring theme is Man's perpetual struggle for freedom and survival which will give birth to a new spirit, representative of the initial stage of the Revolution.

The second part of the mural describes the march of humanity toward the future revolution. Science and technology will be used to build a new

world where peace and culture reign. The elements become more and more positive; hope and rebirth become the main theme. The circular faces of the new, positive leaders represent the dawning of a new day. Races and nations mix to become a single race and nation. Opposite symbols—the eagle of capitalism and the star of communism—appear side by side. The sky offers a new sensation of power, movement and space. Cosmic Man emerges in space like the promise of a new consciousness.

But the march of humanity has not ended. The mural transmits the desire to go even further, to continue building a future separate from violence and repression, to go toward immortality and freedom.

The March of Humanity was Siqueiros' last great work: he died only two years after its completion. It would seem, however, that his spirit decided to stay on and inhabit this place; no visitor has been able to escape the strength and energy transmitted by this work. ❧

Elsie Montiel
Assistant Editor.



March of Humanity Toward the Future Revolution.



The March of Humanity Toward Democracy (detail).

The Twenty-fifth Anniversary of the Polyforum Siqueiros

This year the Polyforum has a lot to celebrate: its own twenty-fifth birthday and the centennial of the birth of the two figures most important in its creation, Don Manuel Suárez y Suárez and David Alfaro Siqueiros. The publication of a book, several events —like the Masked Ball— and the establishment of a non-profit institution for the Polyforum are some of the activities underway to celebrate these anniversaries with the best possible goal: raising funds to restore the Polyforum's installations and murals. The book is a history of the Polyforum, its origins, its architecture, the wealth of the murals which envelop it and the artist who created it.

The Masked Ball —to be held this year for the second time— brings together different artists who express their creativity in mask-making. Their work is auctioned among the guests at a dinner-dance held in the Universal Forum. A competition on new values in experimental art is also planned for next November.

The non-profit institution, founded January 10, has the goal of raising funds to continue the restoration begun a few years ago. Five exterior murals have already been restored, but there is still much to be done to return the Polyforum to its splendor of a quarter of a century ago when it first opened its doors.

David Alfaro Siqueiros, A Brief Biography

Born December 29, 1896, in Chihuahua, Siqueiros was one of the three founders of the modern school of Mexican mural painting (along with Diego Rivera and José Clemente Orozco).

A political activist from his youth, he studied at the San Carlos Academy of Fine Arts, Mexico City, before leaving in 1913 to fight in the army of Venustiano Carranza during the Mexican Revolution. Later

he continued his art studies in Europe. In 1922, after returning to Mexico, he helped paint the frescoes on the walls of the National Preparatory School and also began organizing and leading unions of artists and workmen. During the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), he commanded several brigades for the Republicans. Over four decades, his labor union work and his communist political activities led to numerous jailings and periods of exile.

His murals are characterized by great dynamism and compositional movement, vigour, a sculptural treatment of forms and a limited color range that is subordinated to dramatic effects of light and shadow. He commonly used synthetic lacquer colors sprayed from paint guns in order to speed up the process of decorating large public buildings. David Alfaro Siqueiros died in Cuernavaca, on January 6, 1974. *W*



Siqueiros at work.

Photo: Héctor García

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