

The Querétaro Regional Museum

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THE FORMER SAN FRANCISCO MONASTERY

The Museo Regional de Querétaro (the Querétaro Regional Museum) occupies one of the most significant buildings in the Querétaro state capital, the Large Monastery of San Francisco. Built about 1540, it was linked to the conquest and the settlement of the region begun by Otomí strongmen and the Franciscans. At its largest, the monastery included the great atrium, with its cemetery and four chapels; the main church; the monastery itself; an infirmary; and gardens and corrals. But very little is left

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A baroque, neoclassical and eclectic building.



A monumental stairway up to the top story.



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of the original construction because most of the building has been demolished over the years. In the sixteenth century the area belonged to the province of San Pedro and San Pablo de Michoacán, as the center of the faith for missionary activities and a hospital. It was the first and only parish in Querétaro from its foundation until 1759 when it was turned over to the secular clergy. By the end of the eighteenth century, the economic boom that had financed buildings, altars, paintings and sculptures was over. Large benefactors disappeared as production dropped in workshops and haciendas. The independence movement increased regional economic problems and, after independence, Mexico entered one of the most difficult periods of its history.

As the presence of the clergy diminished in Mexican political circles, the physical dimensions of the monastery also diminished and its uses diversified. Measures against the entire Franciscan complex began in 1860 with confrontations between Liberals and Conservatives, and when the republic was restored, work was begun to remodel the center of the city. In 1874, Governor Benito Santos Zenea built a garden in what had been the atrium. Another part of the grounds was earmarked as the site for the Government Palace, but when the construction could not be concluded, it was sold in 1886 and the Grand Hotel was built on it (today it is occupied by a restaurant). In what had been the garden, the Pedro Escobedo Market (today the Constitution Plaza) was built. In 1885, the Franciscans established the Pío Mariano College in the cloister. With the Mexican Revolution, a new stage was inaugurated in the history of the building, a stage that ended in 1936 with the creation of a museum to preserve, disseminate and study our cultural patrimony. This is the museum that continues to exist today.

The Querétaro Regional Museum occupies what used to be the entrance and the four patios with their series of rooms. The main patio with its high and low cloisters, a second called “de los Naranjos” (the Orange-Tree Patio), the patio of the novices and another small one to the back. At the center of the main patio is a baroque fountain with a foliated base and, in the eastern side hallway is a monumental stairway up to the top story; on either side of the landing two plaques commemorate the beginning and end of the construction of this part of the building. After all the transformations in the building, three different architectural styles can be discerned: baroque, neoclassical and eclectic.

THE FOUNDATION

The first activities in favor of establishing the museum were carried out in 1928 when the Finance Ministry gave the building to the state government to set up a religious and colonial art museum. That institution was never opened and the former monastery was returned to the federal government in 1932. Three years later it was handed over to the Public Education Ministry together with the art work amassed during the *Porfiriato* (the 30-year regimen of Porfirio Díaz) and recovered from churches during the 1910-1917 Revolution in collections formed by Don Germán Patiño. The project of giving this valuable collection a home was never abandoned by the federal government, and in 1936 the museum was opened, with Patiño as its director. In 1939, it became part of the National Institute of Anthropology and History. From then on, it has been open to the public with the name of Querétaro Regional Museum.

THE COLLECTIONS

The collections have taken almost an entire century to form. Its objects have different origins, are from different periods and are extremely varied. They range from pre-Columbian to contemporary pieces including furniture, ceramics, apparel, paintings, photographs, documents, weapons and sculptures, among other items.

From the point of view of their origins, there are five different kinds of collections: 1) the one assembled during the *Porfiriato* with pieces donated by Mexico City's San Carlos Academy and from people in the city of Querétaro; 2) another made up of art works recovered from churches and monasteries in the city of Querétaro during periods of political instability; 3) pieces from the Museo Patrio (Museum of the Nation), donated by the state government in 1936, which form the historical collection; 4) donations from individuals, the clergy and the Querétaro city government; and 5) the collection bestowed by the National Institute of Anthropology and History itself.

For decades, the viceregal art works were the museum's main attraction, until 1988 when many of them were loaned to the Museo de Arte de Querétaro (Querétaro Art Museum), where they are currently on display. At that time, the Regional Museum was restructured to emphasize local history in its permanent exhibitions.



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A TRIP THROUGH THE MUSEUM

The rooms are organized chronologically and by topic, beginning with the pre-Hispanic Querétaro room, which deals with societies that existed in the state's three geo-cultural areas: the valleys, the semi-desert and the mountains. The room exhibits pieces of stone, ceramics and sculpture representative of the hunting and gathering societies and agricultural peoples of those times. The environment and architecture are illustrated with maps, drawings and models.

A second room contains materials linked to the indigenous societies of Querétaro, showing the continuity of certain cultural traits of the Americas and the dynamic of contemporary Querétaro indigenous populations. The room exhibits tools, musical instruments, apparel, the doorway of a family chapel and photographs. In the Querétaro in New Spain Room, the process of the state's conquest and colonization and its social, economic and cultural organization are displayed. This room includes important paintings depicting local history, as well as works of art, charts, maps and facsimiles.

The Independence Room emphasizes Querétaro's role in the 1810 insurgent movement, exhibiting portraits of local and national participants and objects from that period that evoke the contribution of Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez, who, on the eve of the independence movement, was locked in a room by her husband, Querétaro's magistrate, to prevent her from warning the conspirators Allende and Hidalgo that he was going to have them arrested. She managed to get word to them, thus averting their arrest. The room also holds weapons, sculptures and facsimiles.

The rooms dedicated to Querétaro as a sovereign state examine the Constitution, its defense of the fledgling nation of Mexico and the conflicts between Conservatives and Liberals, using documents, maps, flags and some weapons of the period.

The room The Triumph of the Republic describes Querétaro's participation in the struggle against the second empire, particularly the defeat of Maximilian in the state capital, using objects, sketches, paintings and documents.

The Nineteenth Century Room displays portraits, furniture, paintings and photographs to depict the state's economic, political and social reorganization once the war had ended.

The room that covers the *Porfiriato* includes furniture, medals, documents and photographs linked to the state's

economic promotion in international fairs and the centennial celebration of the independence movement.

The Revolution Room shows Querétaro's role in the 1910-1917 Mexican Revolution and as the site for the Constituent Congress through an exhibition of the congress' speakers rostrum, a Villista operations table, portraits and other furniture.

The museum also has a monastery library, with valuable old books from monasteries both in Querétaro and other parts of the country. The main topics are theological, but other books about mathematics, chemistry, physics, literature and music can also be found among the collection. The library is open exclusively to specialists' perusal and has a catalogue on compact disk. ■■■

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