



# The Rufino Tamayo Museum Of Pre-Hispanic Art of Mexico

*Alicia Pesqueira de Esesarte\**

The Rufino Tamayo Museum of Pre-Hispanic Art of Mexico opened its doors 25 years ago, in 1974, the realization of a dream for the great Oaxacan painter who wanted to enrich the cultural patrimony of Oaxaca, his native city.

Rufino Tamayo began his impressive artistic career with his contact with pre-Hispanic visual arts while working in Mexico City's National Museum, where he acquired both knowledge and a taste for this part of our culture. This later led him to amass a significant collection of pre-Hispanic pieces from all over Mexico. To gain recognition for the quality of this art, Tamayo told the authorities of his home state he intended to donate his collection to the public.

To hold the pieces, the Oaxaca state government donated and completely restored a house in the state capital dating from the vicerojal period, and with the aid of the well-known Mexican museographer, Fernando Gamboa, installed the collection.

Rufino Tamayo insisted that since the main value of these pieces is aesthetic, they should be considered works of art and therefore come under the auspices of the National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA) and not the National Institute of Anthropology

and History (INAH), as has been the norm. Mexican legislation stipulates that "all works dating from before the twentieth century will come under the jurisdiction of the INAH, while those produced in this century will come under the jurisdiction of the INBA." The implication here is that there was no art in Mexico until January 1, 1901, and that our baroque churches—and in Oaxaca there are unique examples—or the Mayan and Zapotec creations in Uxmal and Monte Albán, or the beautiful pieces of our museum, celebrated by Mexicans and foreigners alike, just to mention a few examples, are nothing more than anthropology or, in any case, history.

The pieces housed in the Rufino Tamayo Museum of Pre-Hispanic Art of Mexico did not acquire their value with time; they have been beautiful since the moment they were made by the anonymous artists who conceived them. It was precisely their aesthetic value that made them survive through time and come to the attention of Tamayo, that great artist of the twentieth century, for whom age or origin were lesser values. Their very beauty made these pieces an undeniable source of inspiration for him, as can be seen in many of his works. **MM**

\* Director of the Rufino Tamayo Pre-Hispanic Art of Mexico Museum in the city of Oaxaca.

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The museum opens Monday and Wednesday to Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.; Sunday from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. It is closed January 1, Good Friday, May 1 and December 25.

