



# The *Carlos Pellicer Cámara* Regional Anthropology Museum

Rebeca Perales Vela\*



Twenty-five years after Villahermosa's Regional Anthropology Museum opened on the banks of the majestic Grijalva River, we cannot talk about its importance in preserving the legacy of Mexico's

main pre-Hispanic cultures without mentioning its principle mentor, poet Carlos Pellicer Cámara, who the museum is named after.<sup>1</sup> The celebrated poet gathered the museum's collection for what was then the Tabasco Archaeological Museum, in 1948, invited by Governor Francisco J. Santamaría.

In 1951, the director of the National Institute of Anthropology and History, the architect Ignacio Marquina, commissioned Pellicer,

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\* Archaeologist and director of the Carlos Pellicer Cámara Regional Anthropology Museum.

Photos by Elsie Montiel, except for Pellicer Glass (p. 112) and the Snail Vessel (p. 110) by Rebeca Perales.



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who by then was working at the National Fine Arts Institute, to organize and direct Tabasco's Regional Museum. Its first site was located across from the Arms Plaza and was inaugurated in 1952.

The museum has always been dedicated to Mesoamerican cultures, which is why Pellicer himself continually referred to it as “a national museum in the provinces.” The main collection is made up of the monumental and smaller Olmec sculptures from the La Venta archaeological site in Huimanguillo, Tabasco. This is the state's most significant collection not only because the Olmecs are considered the first Mesoamerican civilization, possessors of a wealth of knowledge, styles and ideology that preceded the development of pre-Hispanic Mexico's great cultures, but also because of the many obstacles Pellicer and the Tabasco state government had to overcome to get authorization to move the sculptures from their original site since they were threatened by oil extraction in the region.

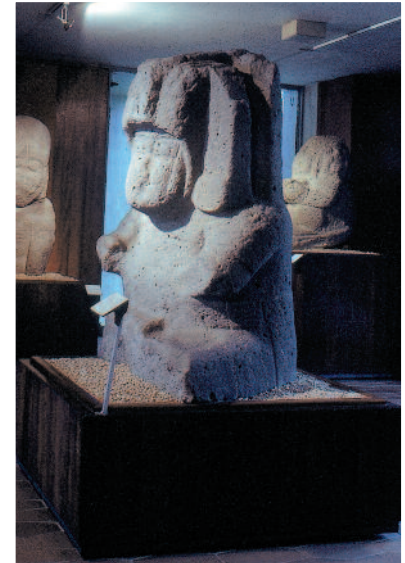
In 1951, Pellicer obtained National Institute of Anthropology and History authorization to move the “Smiling Head” from La Venta to the museum. This was followed

by the relocation of other monumental works that are now part of the museum's collection.

The Smiling Head (see previous page), placed at the entrance of the new museum site, inaugurated in 1980, welcomes visitors. In addition to this piece, the museum exhibits an important number of monumental sculptures from the Olmec culture, recognized for its extraordinary artistic style, in which the theme of humanized jaguars predominates. This is the case of Monument 11 (see below), which represents a seated figure with jaguar features looking upward. Its position has led different researchers to associate it with the observation of the heavens. We can also say that the museum has some of the best examples of smaller-scale Olmec art; the ceramics and stone carvings prove the existence of a group of specialized Olmec artisans.

The Mayan culture makes up a fundamental part of the museum's exhibit. The importance, quality and diversity of the work shows visitors the grandeur of the Mayas settled in Tabasco in the classical and post-classical periods. Works of beautiful, multicolored manufacture, like the “Pellicer





The museum brings together the splendid pre-Hispanic cultural patrimony that Pellicer gathered as a legacy for his people and the world.

glass” (see page 112), beautifully finished like the “snail vessel” (next to the seated figure on previous page), and extremely complex, like the incense holders, all from Tacotalpa Mountain caves, show the world view and religiosity of the Mayan peoples settled in what is now Tabasco. We also have the monolithic stelas with glyphs from the Reforma and Tortuguero site; a funeral urn and bricks from Comalcalco; and objects of bone, shell and silex from the Usumacinta region. They all help us understand the social process of the lowland Mayans. The stucco sculptures, mostly from the Palenque site, the Atlantes from Chichén Itza and a wide variety of small figures from Jaina Island complete the pieces representing this culture.

Pellicer’s interest in all Mexico’s pre-Hispanic cultures and his desire to found a national museum in the provinces prompted him to visit not only all of Tabasco, but also other important museums and archaeological sites to find works that could be included in the Tabasco museum’s collection. Archaeologist Alfonso Caso and Hum-

berto Ruz contributed to this effort, as did state Governor Francisco J. Santamaría and the whole Tabascan population. They managed to gather a splendid collection of originals from the entire the pre-Hispanic period, covering 3,000 years of cultural history, displayed on the building’s three floors.

From the central highlands, the museum boasts the female figures known as the “pretty women,” from Tlatilco’s pre-classical period; alabaster masks, anthropomorphic figures, representations of the god Tláloc and typical Teotihuacan glasses from the classical period, as well as Aztec stone sculptures and ritual objects.

The Gulf Coast is represented by several cultures: from the Mixtequilla culture, the “smiling faces” occupy a significant place because of their manufacture and expression; from the Totonacs, we find a jaguar with wheels and the sculpture of yokes, hatchets and palms. From Remojadas, we have warriors, large-nosed gods, animals and figures from daily life decorated with tar. The Huastec region is included with a stone sculpture.





From Monte Albán, Oaxaca, we find incense holders, examples of the Zapotec culture which was very important in Mesoamerica before the Christian era. It reached its greatest splendor in the middle classical period around A.D. 400.

Although the cultures of Mexico's West were not great builders, they are recognized for the realism of their scenes of daily life painted on clay. Three extraordinary models representing human activity also show us the architecture of their houses.

The poet of America, Carlos Pellicer Cámara, died February 16, 1977. He did not live to see the museum's new building, which would hold the fruit of his efforts, enthusiasm and love for the past. On February 16, 2005, we will commemorate the twenty-eighth anniversary of Carlos Pellicer Cámara's death and proudly celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of a museum that brings together the splendid pre-Hispanic cultural patrimony that the poet gathered as a legacy for his people, the Tabascan people, and the world in general. **MM**

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The museum belongs to the Tabasco state government and is managed under the aegis of the Ministry of Culture, Recreation and Sports' Office of Cultural Patrimony.

MUSEO REGIONAL DE ANTROPOLOGÍA  
CARLOS PELLICER CÁMARA  
AVENIDA PERIFÉRICO CARLOS PELLICER 511  
COLONIA CENTRO, CICOM ZONE  
VILLAHERMOSA, TABASCO  
C.P. 86000  
OPEN TUESDAY TO SUNDAY,  
FROM 9 A.M. TO 5 P.M.

#### OTHER FACILITIES

The museum also includes the Tabasco Regional Information and Documentation Center, with a library, and recording and videotape collections, open to the public Monday to Friday from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. The complete collection is made up of archaeological and historical objects and items from the indigenous peoples of Mexico. It is shared with the National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples, previously the National Indigenist Institute (INI).

In May 1998 a special room for differently-abled persons, displaying more than 80 reproductions of pre-Hispanic works in different materials, was inaugurated. The blind and visually impaired can touch the displays to feel textures, shapes and finishes, and listen to the sounds of rattles, ocarinas, whistles, conch shells and drums, part of the wealth left to us by ancient Mexicans. Explanations in Braille put the finishing touch to the guided visit of the grandeur that was ancient Mexico. The three-story building also has an auditorium with a capacity for 70 spectators and two temporary exhibition rooms.