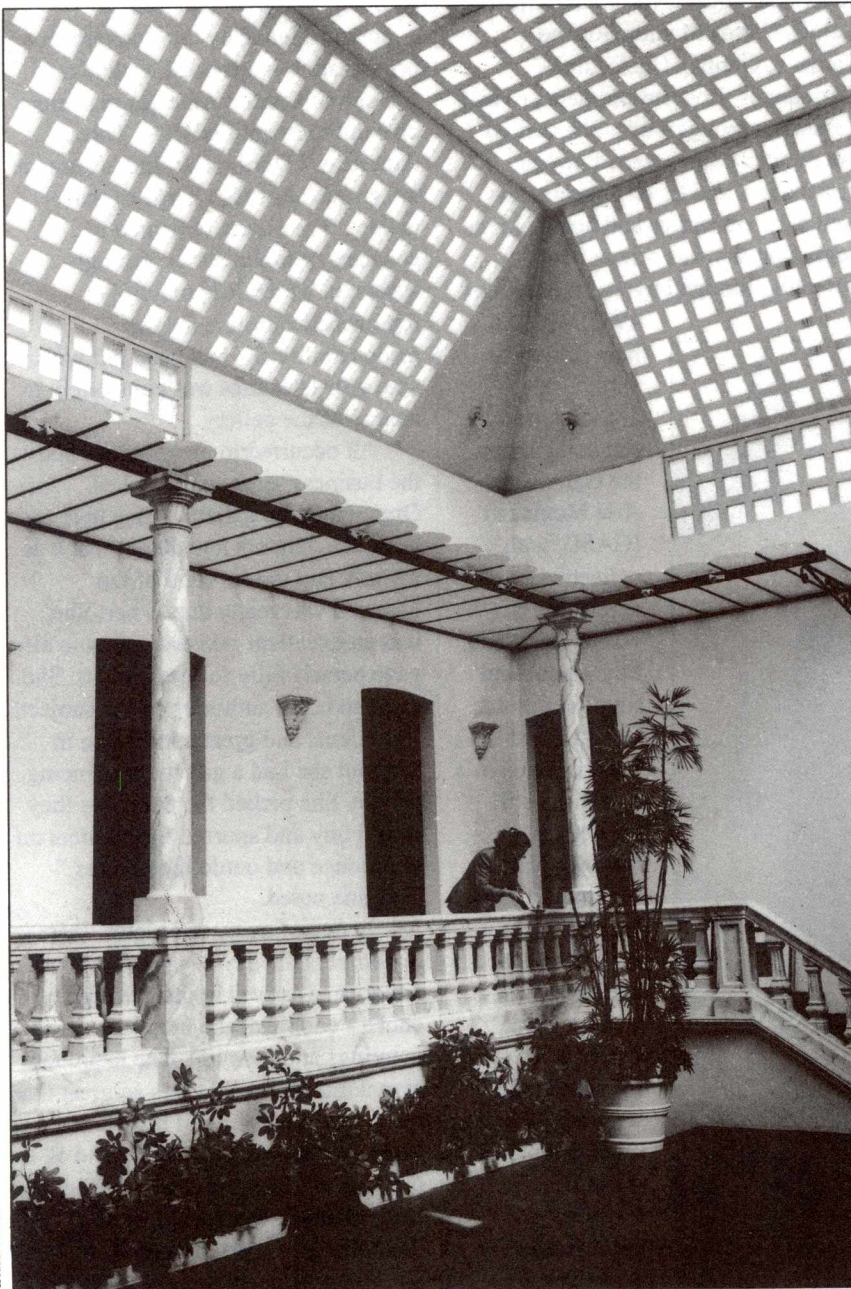


Gallery of Mexican Art



Arturo Píera.

The gallery has a beautiful patio.

In the early the 1930s, Carolina and Inés Amor decided to give Mexico City an indispensable tool for promoting the fine arts in what was, at that time, an unusual way.

They created a space where artists not only showed their art, but could also sell directly to people who liked their work. It was a place which gave Mexico City a modern, cosmopolitan air, offering domestic and international collectors the work of Mexico's artistic vanguard.

The Gallery of Mexican Art was founded in 1935 by Carolina Amor, who worked for the publicity department at the Palace of Fine Arts before opening the gallery. That job had allowed her to form close ties with the artists of the day and to learn about their needs.

In an interview, "Carito"—as she was called by her friends—recalled a statement by the then director of the Palace of Fine Arts, dismissing young artists who did not follow prevailing trends: "Experimental theater is a diversion for a small minority, chamber music a product of the court and easel painting a decoration for the salons of the rich."

At that point Carolina felt her work in that institution had come to an end, and she decided to resign. She decided to open a gallery, based on a broader vision, in the basement of her own house, which her father had used as his studio.

At that time, the concept of the gallery *per se* did not exist. The only thing approaching it was Alberto Mistrachi's bookstore, which had an area reserved for the sale of paintings.

In 1932, the master lithographer Emilio Amero opened a place to sell pictures, but he had to close after a showing of small sculptures which no one bought. A decoration store located in the center of the city also exhibited foreign and Mexican paintings, with similar results.

To steal attention away from the mural painters of the day was no small feat. The art themes of the 1920s and '30s centered on nationalist ideas. Scenes of the Revolution were recreated far and wide on the walls of the city's most important buildings. Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco painted key buildings such as the Palace of Fine Arts, the San Ildefonso Preparatory School, the National Palace and

Chapultepec Castle. Their revolutionary cause received full support from the government.

With great enthusiasm and perfect organization, Carolina laid the groundwork for opening a new space to exhibit art. Her idea was to invite not only famous artists, but also painters who were still unknown: Agustín Lazo, Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, Miguel Covarrubias, Angélica Beloff, Carlos Medina, Rufino Tamayo, Germán Cueto, Julio Castellanos, Roberto Montenegro and Tamariz, among others. She carried out publicity campaigns through newspapers and travel agencies as well as at embassies and hotels. In the beginning she was oriented to attracting foreign buyers. In March of

1935, with the help of friends and acquaintances, she inaugurated the Galería de Arte Mexicano (GAM), with a collective exposition of watercolors, oils, lithographs and small sculptures.

In those days Rufino Tamayo's work was still viewed as "strange" in Mexico. Seeking greater acceptance, he decided to move to New York, where he lived for some time with his wife Olga. Before his departure, Carolina enthusiastically organized an individual showing for him.

She looked for a larger and more central location for this event, which turned out to be quite a happening. This was not the last time Tamayo showed his work at the GAM —after achieving success in the United States he was again invited, but this time at the gallery's new address on General Prim Street.

Six months after the gallery's opening, Margaret Naumberg —commissioned by the Rockefeller organization— invited Carolina on a trip across Central America to present an exhibition entitled "The Three Americas." During Carolina's absence her sister Inés took charge of the gallery. The sisters remained in constant communication through letters, in which Inés playfully reproached Carolina for the responsibility she had been left with. One year later Inés was completely in charge of the gallery.

"It occurred to me that Inés had the business sense that I lacked. Organizing the gallery, being able to bring the painters together —that was my job. But the survival of the business was really due to her. She was an excellent saleswoman who also gave herself fully to Mexican art. She came to be an authority on the subject. Her clients had great confidence in her, and she had a gift for convincing people. She picked the paintings they would buy and spurred the painters on to produce and outdo themselves," Carolina noted.

In one of many anecdotes, Inés remembers the day a pair of Americans arrived at the gallery, chose a couple of the most expensive paintings and then left. The happiness at making such a sale was so great that the painter and some of his friends tossed the money into the air and as the bills fell like rain, the couple came back to the gallery to collect an umbrella they had left behind.

From its opening until today the GAM has had four different directors. In the course of its fruitful and



Arturo Piana.

Entrance to the Gallery of Mexican Art.



Arturo Píera.

Alejandra Yturbe (standing) and Mariana Pérez Amor (seated).

interesting history it has promoted the work of artists belonging to several different generations: Carlos Mérida, Francisco Zúñiga, Raúl Anguiano, Olga Costa, Juan Soriano, Helen Escobedo, Rafael Coronel, Leonora Carrington and many others.

One of the priceless treasures which the GAM preserves is an archive going back to the period when it opened, which is maintained and updated by the gallery's current directors. This archive contains pamphlets, catalogues, newspaper articles, photographs and details about the organization of each exhibition—not one is missing. Anyone interested in writing the biography of a painter from the last seven decades is likely to find unique information in the GAM archives.

Today there are many galleries throughout Mexico. Some open without knowledge or experience in the art business, and therefore have to close in short order, causing a loss of prestige for the artists they promoted. Others, with a purely commercial orientation, lack both the interest and talent necessary to sustain a gallery and support artists.

The GAM has maintained the same level of care and professionalism since its foundation. Today it is located at Gobernador Rafael Rebollar No. 43 in Mexico City's Colonia San Miguel

Chapultepec. It is run by Alejandra Yturbe and Inés' daughter Mariana Pérez Amor. They have intuitively preserved the principles inherited from the legendary Amor sisters.

History seems to repeat itself. Inés left them in charge of

the gallery and after two years decided not to return, with the difference that they could close the gallery if they wished. Their commitment led them to continue. Since her childhood, Mariana was acquainted with famous figures from the art world. She remembers trips with her mother to New York and Europe, where they were received by friends of Inés, all of them extraordinary people from the artistic community. Alejandra had experience in administrative work at the gallery. They both decided to push forward and confront whatever problems might lie ahead.

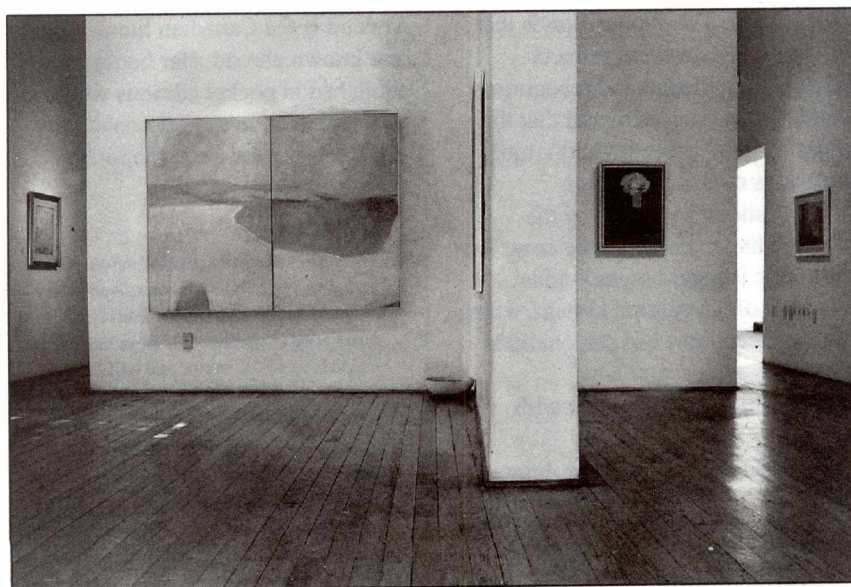
Replacing Inés—who had been a sort of mother, fairy godmother, patron and adviser to many of the artists—did not work out for some who had been around since the beginning. But the new administration also provided a youthful, invigorating new vision to the GAM.

In the book *Historia y testimonios, Galería de Arte Mexicano* by Delmari Romero Keith (Mexico City, 1985), Mariana said: "This work carries heavy emotional baggage; you must work at all hours with very sensitive, emotion-filled people."

For Alejandra, the gallery works "because there is an almost perfect order, which was established many years ago. I think a business sometimes needs order more than intelligence."

The evolution of the GAM reflects, in part, the transformations the fine arts have gone through in Mexico—above all the avant-garde. In contrast to the pattern of Inés Amor's day, 80 percent of buyers are now Mexican and 20 percent are foreigners ❧

Mónica Ching
Assistant Editor.



Arturo Píera.

In contrast with its beginnings, the gallery's buyers are now basically Mexican.