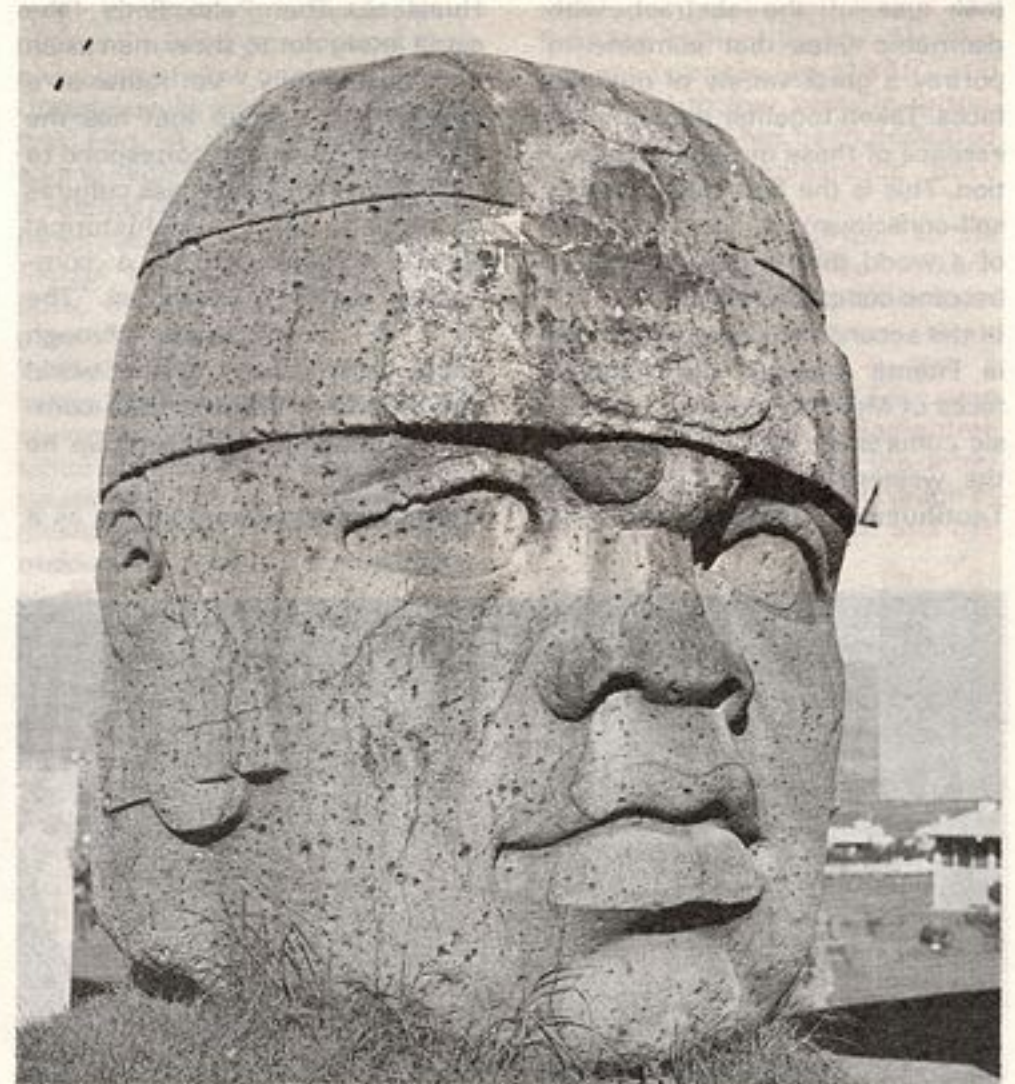


Books

dealing with her subject matter allows the author an overall view of each group's artistic creation. De la Fuente wrote: "Among the technical activities of art historians, one that is often forgotten or pushed aside is the definition, classification, description and organization of the artistic creation of a given culture."

In *Olmeca Colossal Heads* and *Men of Stone* the author combines the catalog form with an iconographic method similar to the formal analysis of Erwin Panofsky's



49



PATHWAYS TO CONSCIOUSNESS

Beatriz de la Fuente, *Pathways to Consciousness*, U.N.A.M.

Pathways to Consciousness is prehispanic art researcher Beatriz de la Fuente's tenth book. Her first work on the subject, *The Sculpture of Palenque* was published in 1965.

In this book De la Fuente developed two basic lines that have been present throughout her work: a systematic inventory of the material she is analyzing, followed by a series of aesthetic deliberations on the same subject matter.

In *The Sculpture of Palenque* the author began outlining a series of hypothesis on Palenque art, using material from archeological research carried out at the site. Through analysis she established a series of stylistic features specific to Palenque culture. Some of her published material is in catalog form, such as *Olmeca Monumental Sculpture* and *Huasteca Stone Sculpture*. This means of

to approach the cultural content of her subject matter.

In *Pathways to Consciousness* De la Fuente's research unfolds in catalog form and then the material is analyzed from a philosophical perspective. The method seems effective in that it allows her to reach the essence of prehispanic creativity.

Beatriz de la Fuente used the title *Pathways to Consciousness: Faces in Prehispanic Art* to conjure up an image of a mounting stairway where man becomes gradually conscious of himself and of the universe through the images of other human beings. "In the faces we see not only subtle expressions of consciousness but also the artistic expression of the culture in which they were shaped."

De la Fuente starts out on her path of study with faces in which there is a will to represent a human figure even though the design still doesn't show intent to represent a specific individual. The author places Mezcala and Chontal masks at this point of the path because of

For 30 years the most incisive political and social reporting in the sunbelt. One of the few independent journals of dissent remaining in this country.

The Texas Observer

biweekly
special introductory rate:
\$17/year

600 WEST 28TH
AUSTIN, TEXAS 78705

odds and ends

their use of the abstract, with geometric lines that combine to portray a great variety of outlined faces. Taken together the common essence of these masks is abstraction. This is the first step in man's self-consciousness. "In the midst of a world that is just existing to become comprehensible"

In the second step on her path, De la Fuente analyzes the sculpted faces of Mexican highland preclassic cultures as well as those from the western part of the country: Teotihuacan, Oaxaca and the

Musstoca. There she finds "the same intent not to show man as an individual entity," but rather as a member of a group that has the stylistic features that correspond to the regions in which these cultures developed. Man has historical significance as part of a community, not as an individual. "The level of consciousness through which man relates to the world around him is based on the common experiences of the group he belongs to."

The author analyzes portraits as a

third step toward consciousness because "a fundamental development is expressed in portraits. Man finds himself, and recognizes the self in both its essence and its changes." De la Fuente considers the Olmeca colossal heads, some of the sculpture from central Veracruz, certain figures from Xochipala and an abundance of Mayan sculpture in this category. She includes both stone and clay figures, as well as some individual figures in the mural of the battle of Cacaxtle.

Deities such as the Cocoioc, Ehecatl, Tlaloc or Chac are placed in this category. Even though their shape is still modeled on the human form, their fantastic features are emphasized in an attempt to grasp the non-visible, that which has no real features because it is divine. At this level of consciousness, "man starts out on his path towards the spiritual. Man finds that his own nature is a changing one, and he goes beyond it."

This is where Beatriz de la Fuente's

50



La convencion. Smiling figure in clay from central Veracruz. National Museum of Anthropology—Photo: José de los Ríos Medina



Engravings in stone (number 26) from Yaxchilan, Chiapas

From the moment an individual stands out from the rest of his group there is introspection; man comes to know himself and thus, begins to know his relation with the world around him. Man goes on to deeper levels of understanding which no longer deal only with himself and his natural environment but go beyond him into the world of the supernatural. This further step along the pathway to consciousness points to his own need to transcend the representation of his immediate natural surroundings and to distinguish between the divine and the human by means of symbols. "Supernatural imagery leads man to an existential understanding that the realm of the sacred, though it may originate in man himself, becomes something entirely different."

At this stage in her research the author analyzes the figures of gods whose form originates in the human figure, such as the Aztec deities Coatlicue, Xochipala and Miclantecuhtli.

The fantastic is analyzed at an even more subtle level within the realm of the supernatural. "It expresses man's more existential relation with the divine; it is a cognizant relation in which man commits himself to making real a conceptual abstraction."

mounting pathway reaches its full meaning. Once man starts out on his journey towards the spiritual, he uses the figures he makes of himself to move everybody in that direction. This transcendent vision of man is what makes an artistic expression valid beyond the time and geographical space in which it was produced.

The author successfully leads us, step by step through theabyrinths of the human psyche. From man as a member of a group to man who conceives the supernatural based on his own essence and being.

The treatment of the subject matter in this book certainly adds new dimensions to the history of art. Not only does De la Fuente classify an important portion of the faces and portraits of prehispanic art, she also develops areas that seemed to have been forgotten by most art historians.

The publication of a book like *Pathways to Consciousness* also points to the editorial development of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, UNAM. The book combines excellent research with high quality photographs of an ample sampling of prehispanic faces, in an attractive format and high quality printing. This book is alluring to both the layman and the specialist. ★