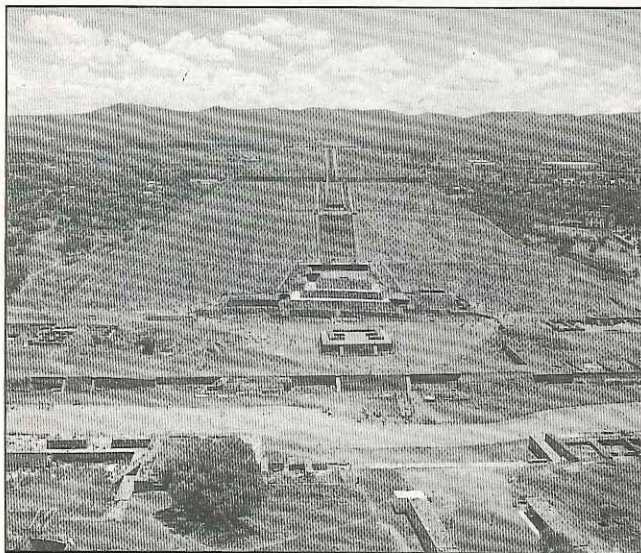


# Mexico: a work of art

María Teresa Márquez\*

**M**EXICANS who travel on business, for pleasure or academic pursuits, have been aware for a long time that, generally speaking, our country simply doesn't exist on the map and that foreigners know very little about us. News from Mexico makes the press, in general, when we have a major natural disaster, a violent murder or a brazen case of corruption.



Teotihuacán: Pyramid of the Sun.

Many Mexicans, conscious that ignorance breeds mistrust and hampers both cultural and economic relations between countries, have initiated concerted efforts, individually or organized in special programs, to change this situation. Naturally, this didn't mean traveling around the world to tell people that the situation in Mexico is "in the pink". However, due to our effort to improve, train ourselves and modernize, there is a tendency towards

\* Director of the Foreign Affairs Cabinet of the Presidency.



Seated figure, 10th-6th century B.C.

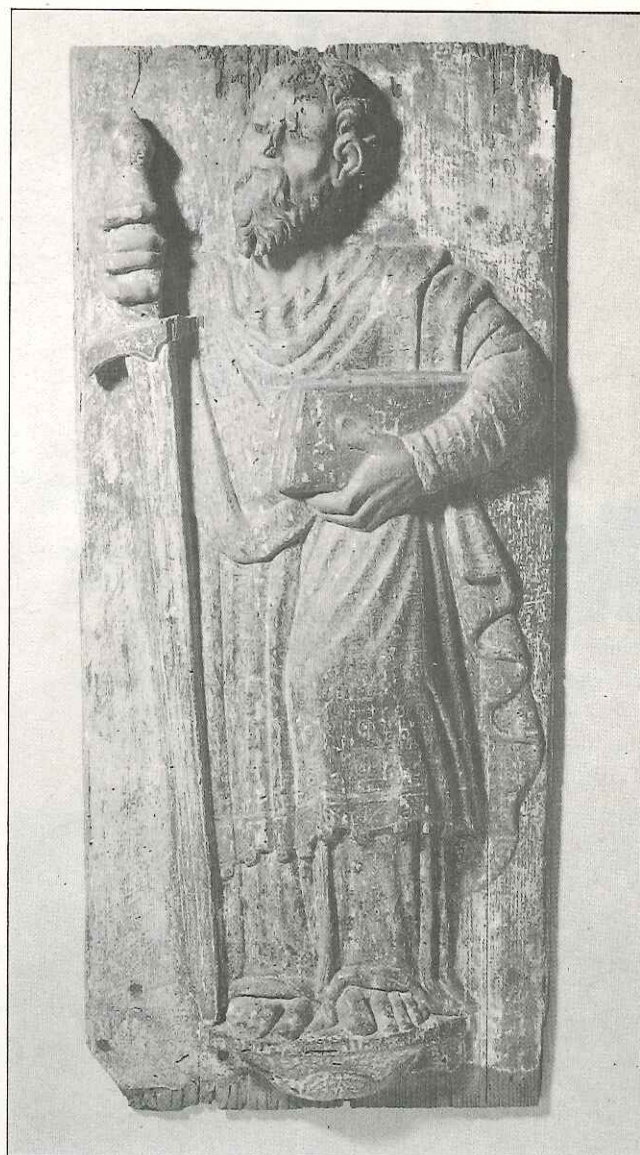
change, and what the outside world says is sounding a bit more optimistic.

One of the most successful programs for accomplishing our goal is *Mexico: A Work of Art*, which includes the extraordinary collection of Mexican art *Mexico: Thirty Centuries of Splendors*, first shown at the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

The exhibit was sponsored by a group of Mexicans known as the Mexican Art-Lovers Foundation. It includes more than four hundred works of art from the earliest Pre-Hispanic, to the Colonial, through the 19th Century and Contemporary Periods. The Metropolitan gave it almost five thousand square meters (more than fifty thousand square feet). After New York, the exhibit travelled to the San Antonio Museum of Art and will be on display at the Los Angeles County Museum in October of this year.

*Mexico: A Work of Art* is a program that endeavors to take full advantage of the exceptional opportunity offered by the exhibit to increase awareness and familiarity with Mexico's rich cultural tradition, and thereby open new avenues for future cultural, commercial, economic and tourist exchange.

The program was focused on the projected audience of four to five thousand visitors in New York



St. Peter and St. Paul, second half of 16th century.

alone, as well as the secondary passive public that would read, hear and talk about it. As is turned out, the New York exhibit drew more than six hundred thousand people. The hope was that those who saw the exhibit, would have a deeper understanding of our traditional values. As a result, they would want to know more about Mexico, and this would promote greater insight into our people.

The challenge, then, was to make full use of the opportunity by making parallel programs available, so that people could pursue their interest in and about other aspects of contemporary Mexico. We were able to develop more than three hundred parallel events, supported by a group of government offices<sup>1</sup>, private enterprise, the academic community, scientists,

artists and others dedicated to promoting the arts and cultural events. The season in New York included cultural, academic, tourist, trade and gastronomic events as well as parallel art exhibits. A similar program took place in San Antonio.

This was by no means an easy task. As the French would say: "New Yorkers are somewhat *blasé*, they've seen it all!" What could we provide to awaken their interest in Mexico, when they have already seen everything? We had to plan carefully and after giving it a lot of thought, we succeeded: they were interested!

<sup>1</sup> The Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the Ministry of Trade and Industrial Development; the Ministry of Tourism and the National Council for Culture and the Arts.

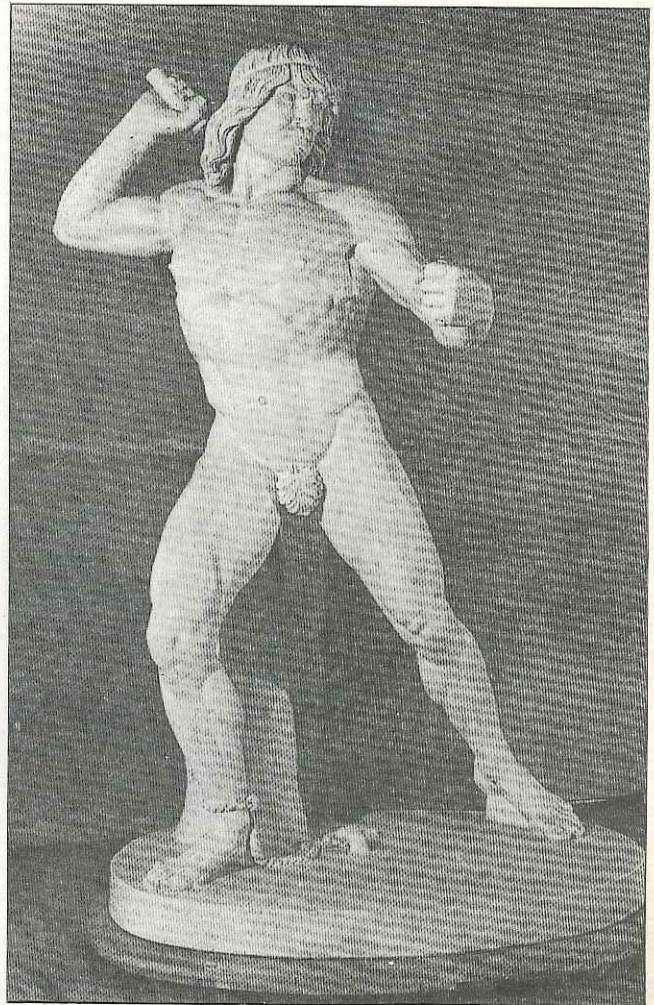
Since Los Angeles has the second largest Mexican population of any city in the world outside Mexico, even more parallel events are expected. The Mexican community both in Mexico and in Los Angeles, are proud of their heritage, and are presently working on special programs that will undoubtedly create a stir.

*Mexico: A Work of Art* has been promoted by many very successful advertising and public relations campaigns. Thousands of words were published by local and national press, as well as by journals in the United States. Press coverage included forty magazines, some of which are among the most widely read in the country, and more than 150 newspaper articles in East Coast publications.

In statistical terms, it is estimated that the press coverage reached more than fifty million readers. Radio and television almost tripled that number to an audience of more than one hundred and twenty two million. The Public Relations Society of America, recognizing the successful effort, awarded its Fourth Annual "Big Apple Award" to the campaign.




Facade sculpture: St. John, about 1684.



The Tlaxcalan General Tlahuicole, 1851.

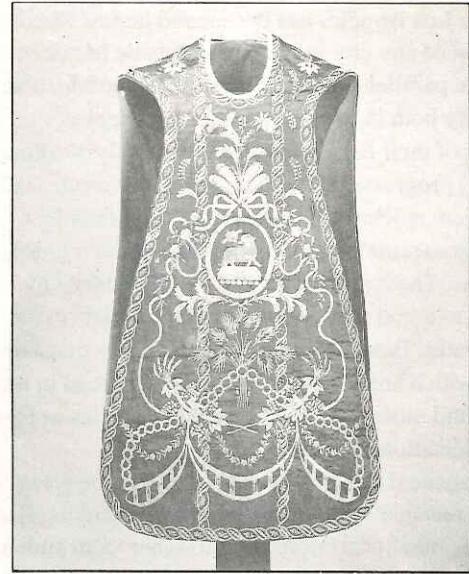
Even though the initial goal of increasing awareness and information about Mexico was achieved, we, who are informed and proud of our country, were astonished by the overwhelmingly positive response from the public in the U.S.

We, as participating members of the Mexican intellectual, cultural and academic community, as well as those of us who work in the government and private enterprise are well aware that time doesn't stop and wait for anyone. Mexico is, indeed, a work of art and we want everyone to know it. In this way, we will be able to join today's modern world.

As we become part of today's world, we hope to buy some time for those who most need it. We also feel, undoubtedly due to unresolved psychological traumas, that the more recognition we receive abroad, the more respect we will have for ourselves. We will be prouder of what we do and who we are, and therefore do a better job in whatever we chose to tackle 



*José Clemente Orozco, Barricade, 1931.*



*Chasuble, about 1795.*



*David Alfaro Siqueiros, Ethnography, 1939.*



*Palenque: detail of stucco relief.*