

Rufino Tamayo International Art Museum

*Mauricio de la Paz**

Located in Mexico City's old Chapultepec Park, this museum offers visitors the opportunity of admiring one of the most important 20th century art collections in Mexico.

Sponsored by private enterprise, the Tamayo Museum, as it is commonly known, was opened in 1981 to house the collection donated to the people of Mexico by painter Rufino Tamayo and his wife Olga. In 1986, it became part of a group of museums administered by the Institute of Fine Arts, receiving additional support from the *Fundación Olga y Rufino Tamayo, A.C.*

The collection

Within the scope of national museums, the Rufino Tamayo Museum permanent collection, consisting of paintings, sculptures, graphic art, photographs and tapestries, is truly unique. It contains a group of works, representative of the changes in universal culture that began at the end of the 19th century. During this period, all traditional concepts were questioned, thereby paving the way for present century "modernity".

In the area of the fine arts, the movement away from the established

aesthetic guidelines which considered all artistic expressions to be little more than a copy of nature, brought with it the personal interpretation of the artists as well as the depicting of a world in constant flux.

Most of the works exhibited at the Tamayo Museum were produced after the Second World War, reflecting a critical position vis-à-vis human vulnerability, violence, solitude and disenchantment.

Nevertheless, they also embody certain tendencies which recover the aesthetic possibilities of color and matter, or the synthesis of traditional form made abstract, whether geometrical or lyrical. This tendency eventually led to the emergence of conceptual languages, the purpose of which involved breaking the illusions surrounding the artistic object and placing a special ephemeral and non-commercial emphasis on technical proposals.

A tour through the museum shows that works are grouped into three 20th century approaches: figuration, abstraction and conceptual art.

The exhibition rooms offer examples of abstract and lyrical expressionism. Especially outstanding are the works by masters such as Soulages, Alechinsky, Hartung, Gottlieb, Frankenthaler and Rothko, representatives of the movement which began in the United States,

particularly in post-war New York. This is non-objective painting, inspired by the desire to use color and form to express intense moods.

Another important part of the collection is devoted to the geometric and kinetic tendencies exhibited in the work of Le Parc, Crippa and Iannelli. It is characterized by the introduction of real movement, provided by mechanical, electrical or hydraulic devices, or by creating the illusion of movement through optical effects (optical art). By viewing the work from different angles, the spectator becomes directly involved in the composition.

There are also examples of geometric abstractionism, with its roots in the cubism of Braque and Picasso, the geometrism of Mondrian and Russian constructivism, among other influences. In these works, the geometric shape forms the basis of solid, rational and mathematically-structured compositions.

As regards different pictorial tendencies, the collection contains expressions of informalist and Spanish "matérico" or material art, created by artists such as Canogar and Tapies.

According to Dorfles, the term "informal" is synonymous with non-geometric abstractionism, in other words, without defined forms. On the other hand, the adjective material (matérico) refers to the importance of the material used as an expressive element in painting and sculpture. Within this genre, the paintings by Tapies and the monumental tapestry created especially for the museum by Catalan Josep Grau, are especially noteworthy.

A retrospective selection of the work of Rufino Tamayo constitutes an essential part of this outstanding art collection. The chronological arrangement allows visitors to gain an insight into the artist's evolution and development together with an understanding of his synthesis of the Mexican spirit. He delves far beyond

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Rufino Tamayo, New York from the terrace, 1937.

the purely picturesque, dealing with universal questions.

Visitors will also find that this collection contains surrealist art, a movement which emerged after the First World War, during the mid 1920s, as a reaction to automatism and dehumanization of society.

Inspired by stimuli emerging from the individual subconscious, the influence of the new trends in psychology, above all psychoanalysis, is very clear in this movement. Such elements are present in the work of Magritte, Miró, the metaphysical painting of Chirico, the Chilean Matta, Max Ernst and André Masson.

The work of Francis Bacon, Jean Dubuffet, Franz Ringel and Frank Anherbach leads us to a new notion of figuration, a tendency which "was mainly centered on the isolated human figure, without any apparent contextual relations, generally deprived of historical and social connotations and moving between subjectivity and objectivity."

Emerging from mass culture and mechanical means of reproduction, Pop Art reflects the situation of recent change within urban culture and is represented by the work of Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein and Alex Katz.

The museum's permanent collection of contemporary sculpture contains work by Arnaldo and Ghio Pomodoro, Henry Moore, Isamu Nogushi, Kiyoshi Takahashi, Barbara Hepworth, Alexander Liberman, Edgar Negret and Sergio Camargo, among others.

Aside from its permanent collection, the museum also has two large sections for temporary exhibitions.

These rooms have been used to exhibit the work of outstanding

contemporary artists such as Robert Motherwell, Fernando Botero, Armando Morales, Dieter Hacker, Andrés Nagel, Sandro Chia and Eduardo Ramírez Villamizar, to mention but a few.

The building

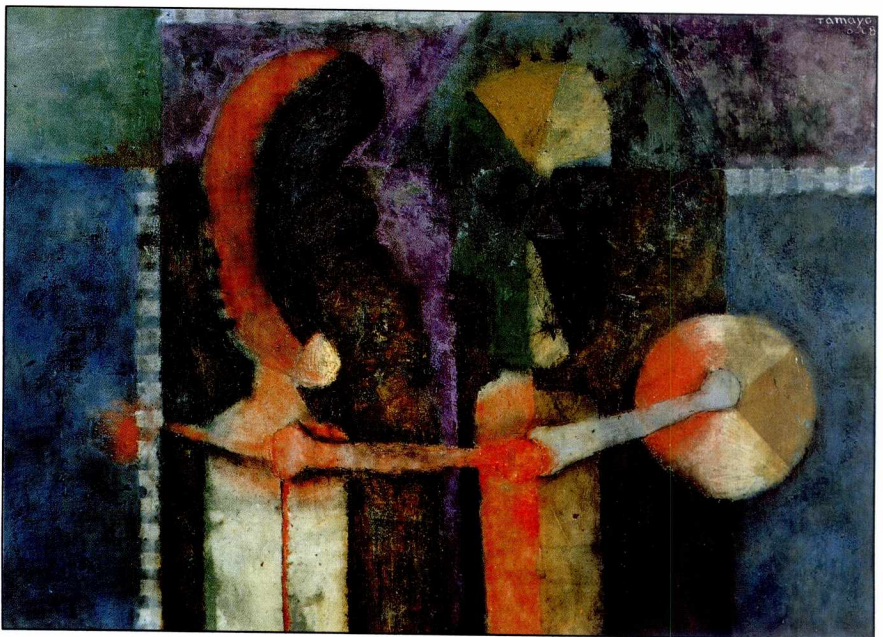
One of the most outstanding examples of contemporary Mexican architecture, this building is one of the few expressly designed as a museum.

The project was awarded the National Architecture Prize in 1981 for its exceptional spatial conception and esthetic solution.

Its beautiful interior and exterior are part of Mexico's rich architectural tradition, which began with the squares and pyramids of the country's pre-Hispanic past and was further enriched by the inner courtyards of convents and the functionality of modern architecture.

Completely built of concrete mixed with marble, the museum's elegant architecture blends in perfectly with its surroundings.

In the Tamayo Museum, exhibit space is structured with the aim of



Rufino Tamayo, Ball players, 1968.

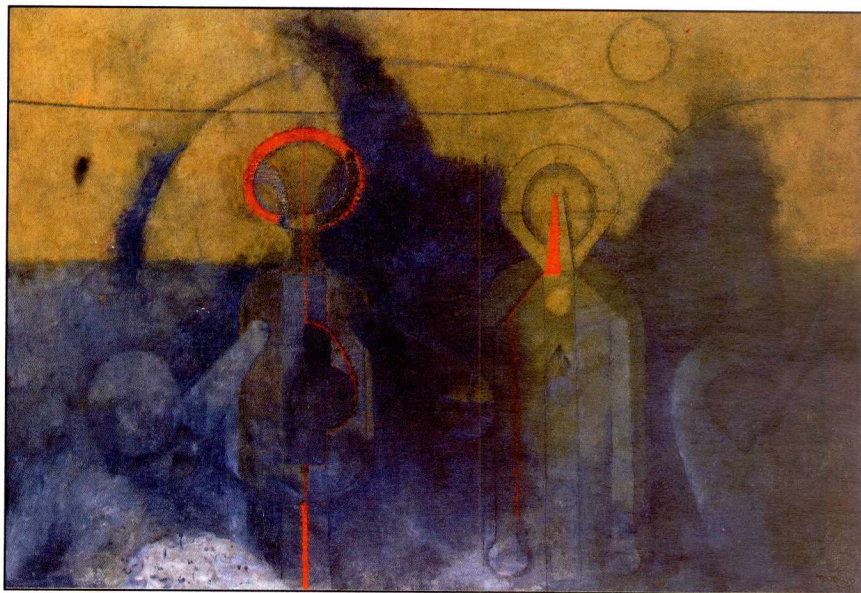
providing a varied array of atmospheres. This is achieved through the use of different dimensions and types of illumination, both natural and artificial. This treatment of space marks the external volumetry of the building.

The large central patio, the system of adjoining exhibition rooms, facilitating the movement of visitors through the different exhibitions, a shaded luminosity and the unmistakable balance between large volumes and empty spaces, are just a few of the most spectacular characteristics of this building.

Occupying an area of 2,800 m² and with 4,500 m² of construction, the building itself is indeed one of the high points for museum visitors. It is totally air-conditioned and has ten exhibition rooms, a sculpture patio, an auditorium (with capacity for 180 people), storage rooms, offices and a shop selling books, magazines, catalogues, posters and other articles on works and artists.

Services offered

In addition to its permanent and temporary exhibitions, the museum is also involved in the organization and



Rufino Tamayo, Women, 1971.


promotion of other artistic events, undoubtedly increasing our involvement with current cultural phenomena.

Activities such as theater, music, dance, literary presentations, conferences, round tables, testimonials, courses, workshops, alternative and special events make the museum a living cultural center.

The museum's international standing has also permitted the

development of programs, designed to promote the work of artists from other countries. While allowing the public to become an active spectator of current cultural dynamics, these programs also enrich the vision of Mexican artists.

Furthermore, the museum houses the Rufino Tamayo Documentation and Information Center, specializing in the collection and updating of bibliographical, journalistic and photographic materials covering the work of the artists who are part of the permanent collection, as well as general, contemporary modern art. The Fondo "Rufino Tamayo," a considerable collection of documents on the artist himself, is another important part of the museum.

The Tamayo Museum offers guided tours, provided by the Educational Services Department. This department handles the organization and administration of special workshop programs and children's summer workshops, in which games and manual activities are used to put children into contact with color, volume, texture, space and other basic concepts of art 



Rufino Tamayo, The family, 1987.