

Collectors and patrons of Mexican art

*María Teresa Márquez **

In the last few decades, major Mexican artists have enriched our national art collection by making important donations of their work.

Diego Rivera donated Frida Kahlo's picturesque house in an old quarter of Coyoacan after her death in 1958. It is now a museum where some of Frida's paintings are shown, as well as works by Rivera, Clausel, and others. The brilliant Rivera designed his own museum, a pyramid of volcanic rock named *Anahuacalli*. The museum's main attractions are the building itself, the architectural sketches for the building, and the splendid "altars of the dead" that the museum's director, Dolores Olmedo—herself an important collector of Rivera's work—has displayed every November since it opened. Ms. Olmedo recently turned her house in Xochimilco into a museum to exhibit her collection of 127 works by Rivera, five by Frida Kahlo, 600 pre-Hispanic pieces (including some marvellous Mayan figurines), a splendid stele, distinctive Zapotecan funeral urns, and some unusual examples of popular handicrafts.

The Tamayo Museum opened in 1981. The great Oaxacan painter struggled for years to establish a

museum in the tree-lined Chapultepec area, Mexico City's museum district, to house his own paintings and his collection of other internationally-known works of art. The museum was originally designed as a mixed government and private-enterprise institution, with a board of directors composed of private individuals. Later, Tamayo handed the museum's administration over to the government.

Tamayo donated a beautiful house in the city of Oaxaca to exhibit his own works, with their distinctive colors, as well as his superb collection of pre-Hispanic art.

Francisco Toledo, another Oaxacan painter and patron of the arts, founded the Oaxaca Institute of Graphic Arts in the state capital, encouraged the creation of the Oaxaca Museum of Contemporary Art, and set up the Oaxaca Cultural Center in Juchitán, his birthplace.

In Zacatecas, the Rafael and Pedro Coronel Museums exhibit the works of the two brothers. Manuel Felguérez's works will probably soon be housed in another old mansion in this beautiful Colonial city in the center of our country. Pedro Coronel spent years collecting European, Asian and American art from all periods so that the inhabitants of his native city could enjoy some of civilization's great works.

The Rafael Coronel Museum has a splendid collection of popular masks and puppets from Rosete Aranda's company, well-known to Mexican children since the mid-19th century. They appear in picturesque scenes of everyday life from different periods in history.

No list of artist-patrons would be complete without the painter José Luis Cuevas, who opened his museum last July. The Cuevas



Diego Rivera.

Lola Alvarez Bravo.

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Museum occupies the former Convent of St. Ines, in Mexico City's "Historical Center." Visitors can admire works from the so-called "break-away period" in Mexican painting (the departure from muralism), as well as prints by Picasso.

There is a growing number of private firms and collectors in Mexico with an interest in acquiring and promoting national art. Prominent examples are Mexico City's Center of Contemporary Art and the Monterrey Museum of Contemporary Art. The former, a superb enterprise that has brought prestigious foreign exhibitions to our country, was created by the Televisa Cultural Foundation. It has acquired important contemporary works by Mexican and international artists.

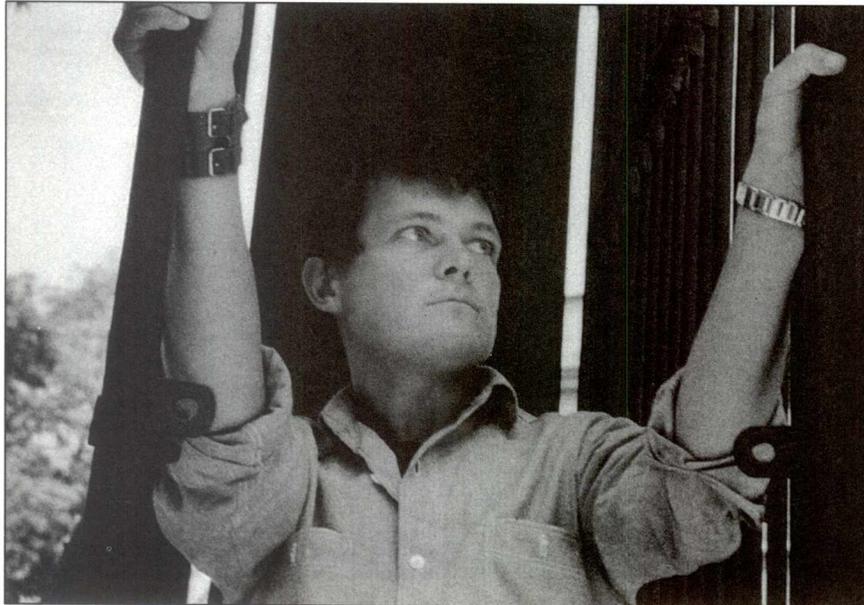
Monterrey's Museum of Contemporary Art opened in 1991. Monterrey is an industrial city whose thriving business community has enriched the region's cultural life with museums, ballet groups, and symphonic orchestras. The museum is housed in a magnificent building designed by the noted Mexican architect, Ricardo Legorreta. It was originally intended for temporary



Frida Kahlo in her house in Coyoacán.

Lola Alvarez Bravo.

José Luis Cuevas.



Lola Alvarez Bravo.

exhibitions, but its patrons now plan to acquire works on a regular basis as well.

Mexican art is experiencing a revival in the international art market. The 1930s and '40s were a period of heightened pan-Americanism in the United States. There were many exhibitions of Latin American art, and particularly Mexican art. Americans later succumbed to the fascinations of Abstract Expressionism,¹ however, and it is only recently that there

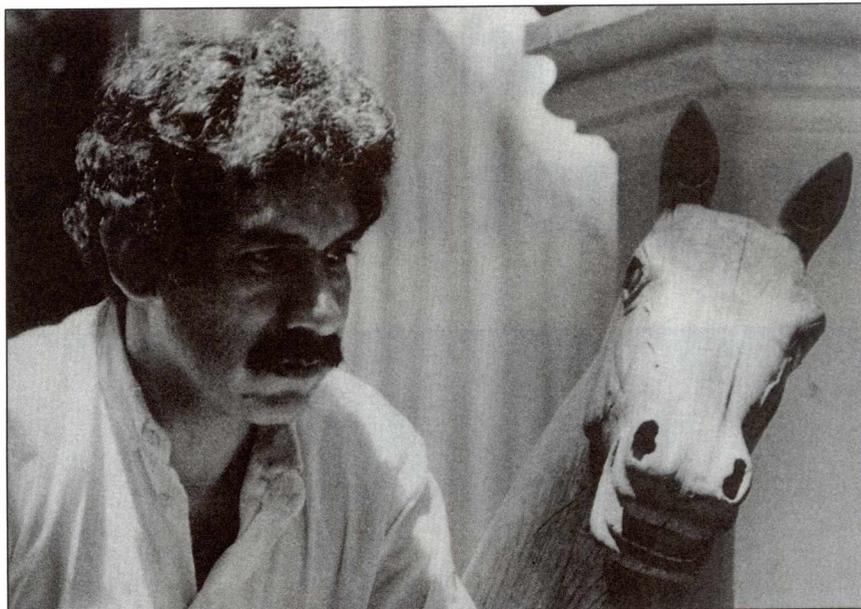
¹ Mexico boasts distinguished exponents of this trend, but Americans never regarded them as sufficiently "intellectualized" or intelligent artists, preferring more visceral, naïve or folkloric forms of Mexican art.

has been a revival in their interest in Mexican art.

In the last several years, Mexico has again taken her place in American art magazines. Prestigious galleries in the United States, Europe and Japan compete to represent Mexican painters, and auction houses boast of obtaining unprecedented prices for our artists' work.

Mexican collectors, who continue to be the main purchasers of Mexican art, still travel to auctions at Christie's and Sotheby's to bid for works by Mexican artists. This suggests that prices are lower there than in Mexican galleries.

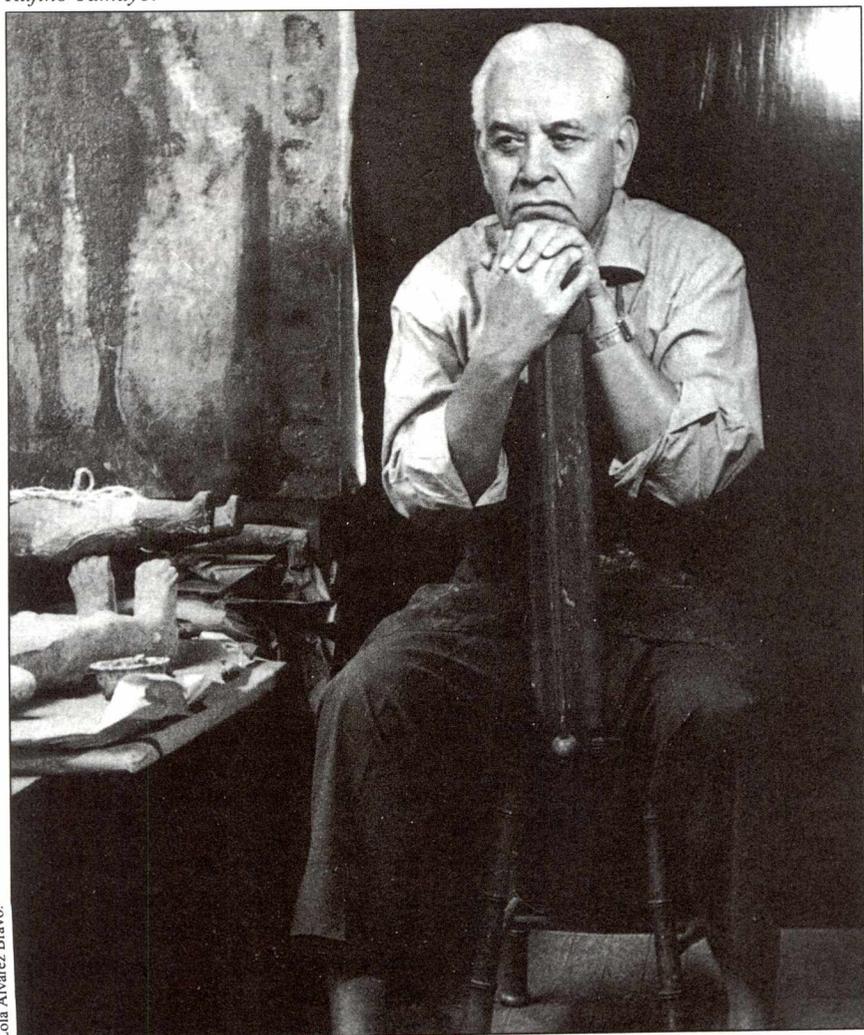
The promotion carried out by government and private galleries, as



Rafael Coronel.

Lola Alvarez Bravo.

Rufino Tamayo.



Lola Alvarez Bravo.

well as the acquisition of contemporary artists' work by various museums throughout the world (including the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, as a result of the "Mexico: Splendors of Thirty Centuries" exhibition), have resulted in skyrocketing prices for Mexican art.

This has happened not only with the work of such recognized figures as Frida Kahlo, who is presently in vogue, but that of young painters who find themselves unable to keep up with the demand for their work from galleries and private collectors.

Magazines all over the world now contain paid announcements of gallery exhibitions by a large variety of Mexican artists, and reviews of works by Nahum Zenil, Alejandro Conga, Adolfo Patiño, Laura Anderson, José Luis Romo, Rocío Maldonado, Roberto Márquez and Julio Galán, among others.

It is striking that the new exponents of Mexican art have returned to hyper-realism, which combines primitive religious traditions and votive offerings with the artist's own message, but which foreign critics often find outrageous X