

The University Museum of Contemporary Art

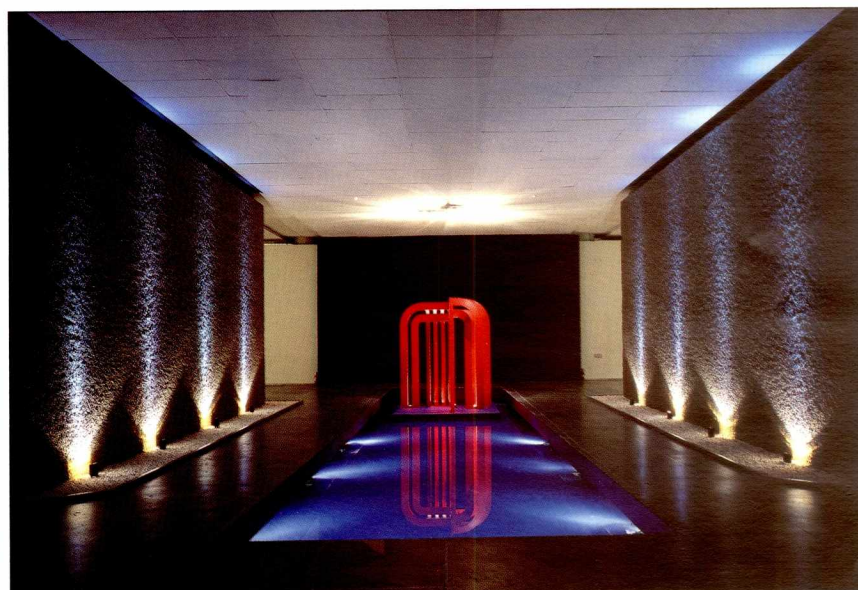
The University Museum of Contemporary Art (formerly the University Science and Art Museum) was set up in 1960 next to the Architecture Faculty in University City.

From the time of its establishment until last November, the museum alternated art exhibitions with exhibits on scientific and humanistic topics. However, since the creation of the “Universum” Science Museum (see *Voices of Mexico* 25), it has been exclusively devoted to contemporary art.

Occupying 2,800 square yards, its adaptability has made it a model for other museums. In 1961, Julio Scherer, then a reporter for *Excelsior* newspaper, wrote that the museum “Has a spacious entrance hall.... Simply walking inside gives one a marvelous impression. The museum’s construction —there are no pillars— is certainly eye-catching. But the light inside, which permits full visibility due to the combination of natural and artificial light, is what is initially most striking.”

The University Museum of Contemporary Art holds about four large exhibitions and three smaller ones annually, thanks to the participation of institutions and private collectors who lend their art collections for this purpose.

During its three decades of existence, the museum has held painting, sculpture, engraving and photography exhibitions, covering such diverse topics as astronomy, mathematics, biology, law, accounting, and industrial and graphic design.



Sebastian, Cathedral, painted metal, 1989.

Some of these exhibitions have had great museological importance.

The first exhibitions held here were “Pre-Columbian Art of the Gulf,” coinciding with the American Society of Anthropology’s first meeting in Mexico, and the “First Salon of Student Painting at UNAM,” which included 194 paintings by 80 beginning artists who participated in the First University Painting Competition.

El Universal newspaper (March 8, 1960) commented, “Doubtless some of the great Mexican painters of the future will be included among the competitors.” As indeed they were. The first and second prize-winners, Miguel Hernández Urbán and Edmundo Aquino Pérez respectively, as well as Leonardo Nierman, who received honorable mention, would take part in the 1990 exhibition, “Three Decades of Plastic Expression.”

January 1961 saw the inauguration of the exhibition “Artistic Treasures of Peru,” which included 212 pieces of gold and Peruvian art from all periods. Visitors flocked to see the exhibition, whose success is still remembered.

In 1968, the museum held an exhibition on “Kinetic Art,” which brought apparatuses that worked with light, electricity, water, foam or bubbles and earth.

The 18 kinetic settings were produced by artists from 11 countries, and aimed to rediscover natural elements through technical and mechanical means. The museum was conceived as a labyrinthine unit in which the public would move from one setting to the next to experience the impact of each work.

Among the most striking rooms were those with stroboscopic light,



Leopoldo Flores,
Man-Sun, Cosmovitral
of Toluca.

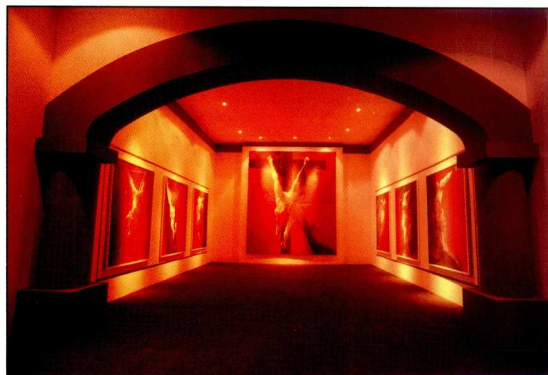


Jorge Quiroz,
Isabel Cibernetica,
mixed media, 1988.



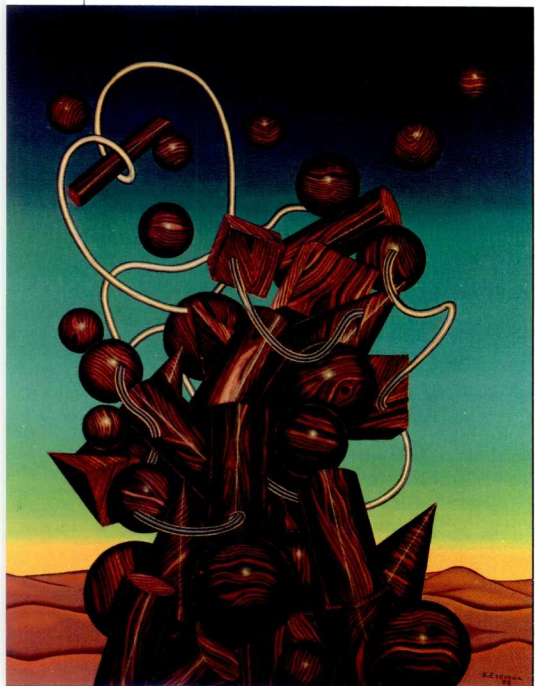
Sergio Dorantes.

"2000 A.D." exhibition.



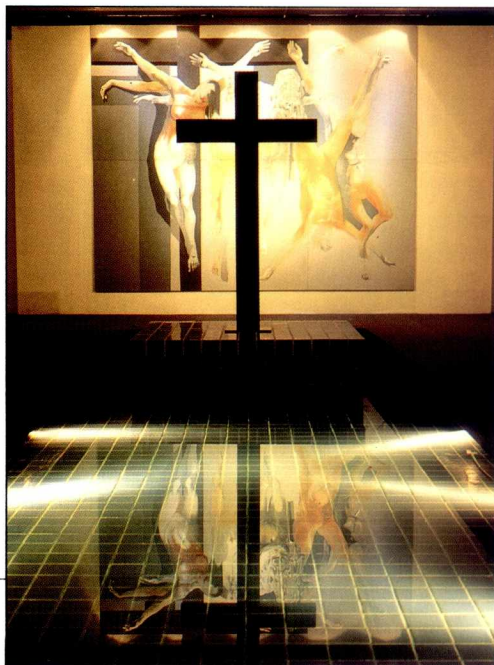
Sergio Dorantes.

A sample of the
beautiful layout of
"2000 A.D."
exhibition.



Xavier Esqueda,
Monument, oil on
canvas, 1988.

Leopoldo Flores,
Don't Cry, My Daughters
of Jerusalem, 1993.

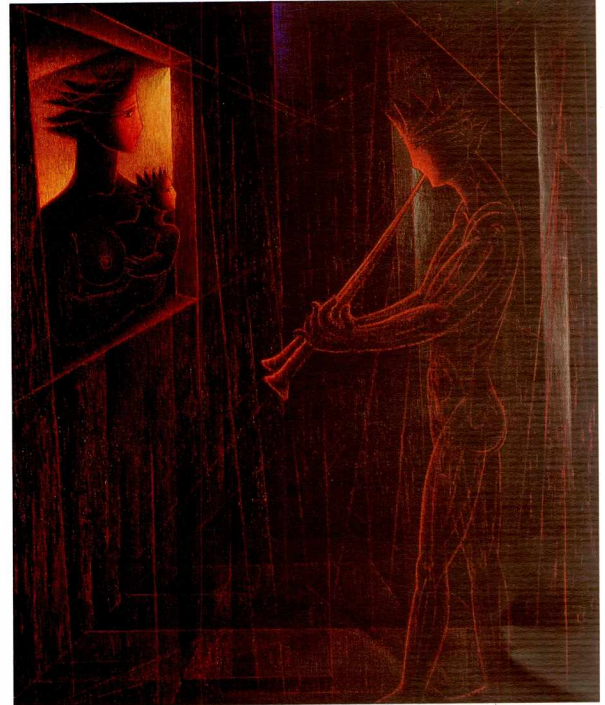


Sergio Dorantes.

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Leopoldo Flores, Jesus in the River, 1993.



Miguel Hernández Urbán, Family, acrylic on canvas, 1990.



Sergio Dorantes.

Leopoldo Flores, Hanged with His Umbilical Cord (center), 1983.



Sergio Dorantes.

Entrance to the "2000 A.D." exhibition.



Benjamin Domínguez, Hell, oil on canvas, 1989.

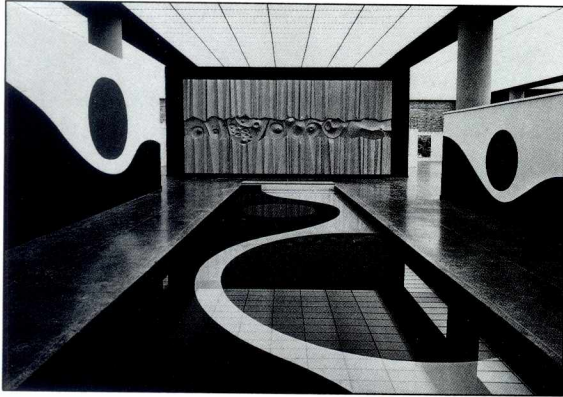
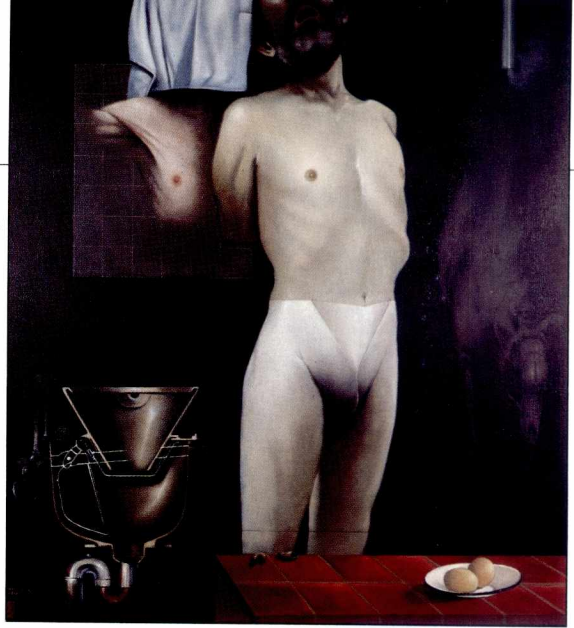
Leopoldo Flores, Andromeda, Cosmovitral of Toluca.





Ana Luisa Domini, Nocturnal Butterfly, 1986.

Arturo Rivera,
Region of
Variations,
oil on canvas,
1987-1989.



Tapio Wirkkala, Last Bulrush, mural on wood, 1972.

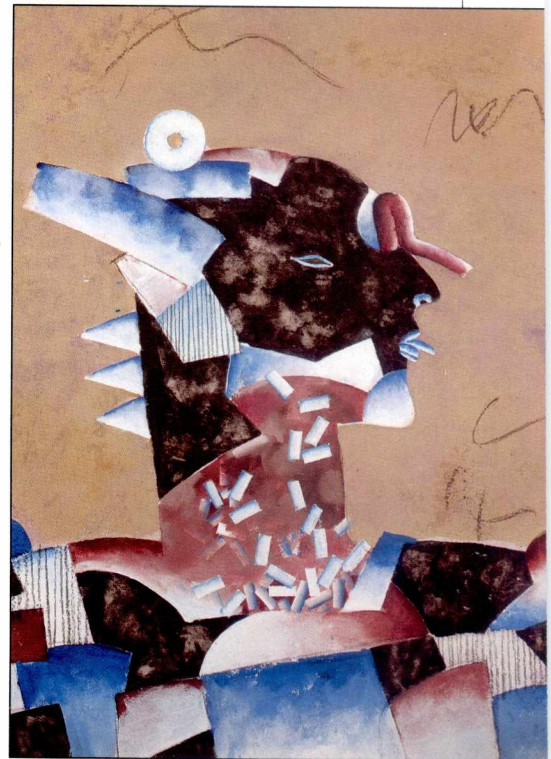


Leonardo Nierman,
Genesis, mixed
media on
fiberboard, 1990.



Esther González,
The Ermine Woman,
oil on canvas, 1990.

Brian Nissen,
Medium Profile,
acrylic on canvas, 1981.





Fernando Ramos Prida,
Three and Time, acrylic
on canvas, 1980.



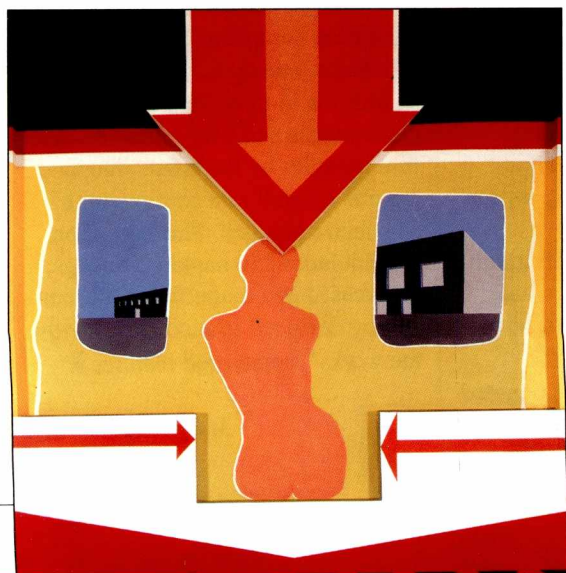
Carmen Padin,
Plumed Village,
"ixtle" fibers, 1980.



Augusto Escobedo,
Metamorphosis of
Form, "lost-wax"
bronze, 1976.



Salvador Pinoncelly, In God We Trust, stained glass, 1986.



Felipe Ehrenberg,
Conceptual Art, acrylic
on fiberboard, 1968.



Carla Rippey,
Annunciation,
pencil drawing, 1989.



Sergio Dorantes.

"2000 A.D." comprises 80 acrylic canvasses, mostly 6.5' by 6.5' in size.

electric noise-sensitive light and light energy, and those with storm simulators, smoke, foam and laser rays.

One of the participating artists remarked, "Seeing is no longer the most important means of acquiring knowledge. Listening, shouting, touching and smelling are now more important.... Art has invaded the field of natural energy and technology."

The exhibition called "A Viking in Mexico" was also held in 1968. The Finnish artist Tapio Wirkkala astounded the public with his work *Ultima tule* (The Last Bulrush), a magnificent wood carving thirteen by thirty feet in size.

In 1969, the highly-successful "Independent Salon" presented works by avant-garde Mexican painters. In the words of the painter José Luis Cuevas, "This is not a commercial exhibition. It is the result of a struggle to break away from official art. Its main feature is freedom of expression. All plastic trends are represented here."

That same year saw a different kind of exhibition, "The Life and Works of Thomas Mann," in which photographs, books, manuscripts and testimonies were used to illustrate

the thought and experiences of this great personality.

One of the exhibitions with the greatest impact was "Death: Mexican Expressions of an Enigma," which showcased the best of Mexican art on the subject. Inaugurated in November 1974, the exhibition was so successful that it remained open until April 1975.

"Sebastian, A Universe of Forms" (1987) combined the twin talents of the sculptor Sebastian and the museum specialist Rodolfo Rivera. Elisa García Barragán, former director of the Institute for Aesthetic Research, commented on the exhibition: "The dialogue between the two creators extended to the spectator, who was therefore able to integrate himself into the aesthetic relationship...."

The outstanding exhibition "Three Decades of Plastic Expression" was organized in 1990 to commemorate the museum's thirtieth anniversary. The 114 Mexican and foreign participating artists, some of whom had been members of the "Independent Salon" in 1969, donated the works shown in the exhibition to the National University of Mexico.


Paintings, sculptures, engravings, serigraphy, stained-glass windows and multimedia techniques make up this important collection. Almost-monochrome canvasses contrast with works from the most diverse trends: Realism, Surrealism, Hyper-realism, Geometrism, Abstract Art, Conceptualism, Expressionism, Op Art and naïve art.

The museum houses a number of collections that make up part of the university's heritage. These include gifts offered by the visiting Olympic delegations in 1968 as a symbol of fraternity.

The museum has benefitted from the acquisition of the Spratling collection, archeological pieces from Veracruz from the pre-Classic period; the Rosch collection, 800 pieces from the pre-Classic period of the central highlands, and the Hecht collection, with Oriental and African sculptures.

The museum also holds Diego Rivera's sketches for his artistic project for the university stadium and Carlos Mérida's sketches for decorating the mural at the Juárez housing complex.

The University Museum of Contemporary Art is currently holding the "2000 A.D." exhibition by Leopoldo Flores, creator of the Toluca "Cosmovitral," with its 3520 square yards of stained-glass windows, considered one of the largest and most important works in this genre.

The spectacular "2000 A.D." exhibition comprises 80 acrylic canvasses, mostly 6.5' by 6.5' in size, in addition to three 16.5-foot-long cloth murals and fifty seven- by nine-foot modules by the artist, who regards himself as a continuator of Mexican muralism. The exhibition also includes 250 napkin drawings, all showcased in a magnificent museum setting designed in accordance with the works' themes and features 

Marybel Toro Gayol
Managing Editor.