

# The Old San Ildefonso College Presents “The Mayas” and “Art of the Academies”

Angela de la Riva\*

The Old San Ildefonso College, one of Mexico City’s most important cultural venues, hosted the exhibit “The Mayas” from August to December 1999. More than 557 pieces, rigorously selected for their beauty and variety, testified to the fundamental achievements of this Mesoamerican civilization.

Organized by theme, the exhibition clearly illustrated the Mayas’ relationship to nature, the architectural and religious design of their cities, the social fiber of their civilization, the central characters of their society, as well as their inscriptions with their mathematical, astronomical and historiographic content. For the first time this exhibit gathered together works from the main cities of the Maya region, representing different periods of the civilization’s development with, however, considerable predominance of the classical period from A.D. 300 to A.D. 900.

Guatemala, Honduras, Belize, El Salvador and Costa Rica all contributed their national collections, which, together with the collections of 40 Mexican museums, brought the public the magnificence of Mayan art in an

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\* Journalist.

Photos by Michel Zabé.

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Detail of an incense holder. Late classic period, Palenque, Chiapas.  
Alberto Ruz Lhuillier, Site Museum, Palenque.

unprecedented show that would be hard to replicate.

“Los Mayas” was a major success in Venice’s Palazzo Grassi before coming to Mexico. Historian Dr. Mercedes de la Garza, a Mayan culture specialist and current director of the National Museum of Anthropology, selected the works exhibited in Mexico. The special museographical infrastructure was donated to the Old San Ildefonso College by the Palazzo Grassi, which is why the project’s concept can be traced to Italian architects Agata Torricella and Giuseppe Caruso. On the Mexican end, architect Ernesto Betancourt coordinated the museography and directed the exhibit in close collaboration with the Italian team.

“The Mayas” presented a panorama of 30 centuries of civilization in a space, the Old San Ildefonso College, which allowed for the meshing of the venue’s monumental architecture and the majesty of the Mayan art.



- ❶ Disk from Chinkultic. La Esperanza, Chinkultic, Chiapas. Late Classic. National Museum of Anthropology.
- ❷ Ball player. Late Classic. Jaina Island, Campeche. National Museum of Anthropology.
- ❸ Anthropomorphic figurine. Classic. Jaina Island, Campeche. National Museum of Anthropology.
- ❹ Receptacle. Late Postclassic. Mayapán, Yucatán. Regional Museum of Anthropology, Cantón Palace, Yucatán.
- ❺ Leandro Izaguirre, *Academia*, ca. 1866.
- ❻ François-André Vicent, *Académie d'homme assis, le bras levé*, 1772.



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#### “ART OF THE ACADEMIES”

From October 1999 to January 2000, San Ildefonso presented another exhibit, “Art of the Academies. Seventeenth to Nineteenth Century France and Mexico,” the encounter of drawing and painting within the canons of the visual world of the academies.

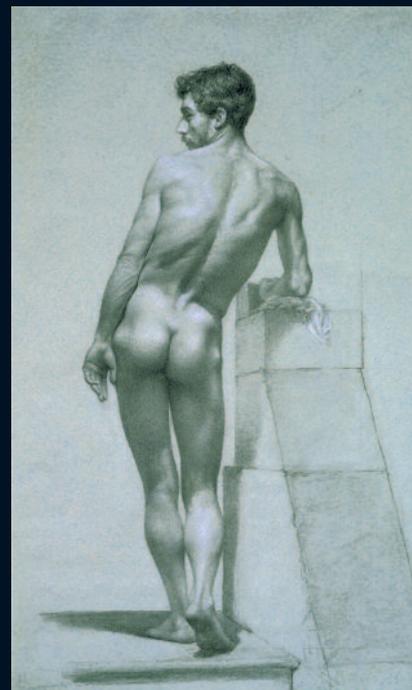
Curated by Luis Martín Lozano, this exhibit follows the art academies from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, paralleling the rise of the European nation-state; they were part of the

visionary educational and artistic projects that every nation undertook at the time: in the case of France, in the seventeenth century under Louis XIV and in Mexico, during the nineteenth century. Among the most important works in the exhibit are *Achilles Receives the Ambassadors of Agamemnon*, by Jean Auguste-Dominique Ingres, which earned him the Grand Prize for Painting in Rome in 1801. There are also exquisite works from the Louvre, which made an exception to its usual rule by letting some of its prize pieces be shown for the first time in the Americas.

Backing the exhibition are also the National Higher School of Fine Arts of Paris, the Museum of Decorative Arts of Paris, the Girodet de Montargis Museum, the Philadelphia Art Museum, the National Art Museum of Catalonia and several Mexican institutions like the San Diego Viceroyal Painting Gallery, the National Museum of Art, the San Carlos National Museum and the National Bank of Mexico (Banamex).



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Among the Mexican contributions to the exhibit were drawings by students of Rafael Ximeno y Planes and Gerónimo Antonio Gil; by Pelegrín Clavé; preliminary sketches for compositions and oil outlines of the dome of Mexico City’s La Profesa Church. From Spain came several pieces from private collections that were shown for the first time.

“Art of the Academies. Seventeenth to Nineteenth Century France and Mexico” was dedicated to one of the most unfairly forgotten of the fine arts, drawing, and its importance to the creative process. It is both a way to generate ideas and a theoretical support for painting, sculpture and even architecture.

Visit Mexico City’s Old San Ildefonso College, located downtown at Justo Sierra 16, a cultural venue where you can enjoy national and international exhibits that will bring you a delightful taste of culture and entertainment. **NMM**