

The Querétaro Art Museum

Yolanda Cano*
Guadalupe Zárate**



Photos by Daniel Munguía

The Museo de Arte de Querétaro (The Querétaro Art Museum), housed in the former San Agustín Monastery, one of Querétaro's most admirable baroque buildings, was inaugurated in 1988. In this

article we will focus on its architecture and collection, the museum's most striking attributes.

THE ARCHITECTURE

The museum is part of the San Agustín Church complex, whose facades are baroque, the main one with mannerist influence. Its unique dome

* Architect and coordinator of the Querétaro State Historical Buildings Catalogue.

** Historian at the National Institute of Anthropology and History, Querétaro.



The San Agustín Church dome with musician angels is a remarkable piece of baroque art (left). The heads of some herms have Corinthian capitals (right).

with musician angels holding different instruments is also of note, as is the sacristy, with its important examples of viceregal art.

The two-story cloister has two facades: the main one, built in the early twentieth century, faces Allende Street; the side one, very possibly the original, in the baroque style, faces the church's atrium.

The cloister's architectural layout is organized through a central patio with a portico and wide surrounding corridors. As in most monasteries, the ground floor holds the porter's hall, the refectory, the kitchen, the chapter house, the library, the stables and the warehouses, and the upper floor, the cells. Given the different uses the building has had since the Augustinians were expelled in the mid-nineteenth century, it is difficult to identify the original spaces, but the essential structure is intact.

The museum's shop was originally the vestibule. The square patio has a portico formed by four semi-circular arches on fascicular pillars with molding. It has a mezzanine with an arris vault and a rose-window in the center. The east portico holds the access to the stairs leading to the upper floor through a semi-circular arch; the arch keystone is decorated with the Augustinian heart inside a scallop shell.

At the center of the main patio is a fountain with a multi-leveled base growing out of a dodecahedron, dedicated to the monastery's benefactor, Don Julián de la Peña. The upper floor portico is formed by semi-circular arches and pillars in line with those on the ground floor.

The most important thing about the building are the facades of the upper and lower porticos, formed by four semi-circular arches on each side with the same structure on both floors. The arches grow out of pillars with molding and their keystones are decorated with scallops holding symbols and Augustinian saints framed with decorative plant carvings. On both levels the spandrels are decorated with carvings of plants and animals like pelicans, pegasus and grotesques. Each pillar has back-to-back herms made up of parts of the human body and geometric and plant forms. The heads of the herms on the first level have Corinthian capitals and their necks have large spiral scrolls with a tassel hanging from the center. The herms of the top floor are shaped like human bodies above the waist with the arms uplifted to the sides of their heads, making symbolic signals with their fingers; from the waist upwards they have foliage that turns into fluting and finally an enormous spiral scroll. In addition to being

decorative, the top-floor herms are gargoyles that double as drains for rainwater.

In 1935, the building was declared a historic monument and has been designated by the UNESCO as a World Heritage Treasure.

THE MUSEUM

The museum has 13 rooms for permanent exhibitions, which fundamentally hold works of Mexican art from the viceregal period to the nineteenth century. The collection began to be gathered during the *porfiriato* when the San Carlos Academy donated a large number of works on religious themes by the most outstanding artists from the colonial period and nineteenth-century paintings by, among others, the Pelegrín Clavé school. Don Germán Patiño, an illustrious favorite son of Querétaro, was responsible for this first collection. It was replenished years later when the political instability of the Revolution endangered the security of valuable works of art from churches and monasteries, and they were stored in the Fine Arts Academy.

After decades of Don Germán's determined efforts, the Regional Museum was established in 1936. A good part of the collection exhibited there was later loaned to the Art Museum, where it is currently housed.

Our visit begins on the top floor with rooms 3 and 4, where the mannerist works of both

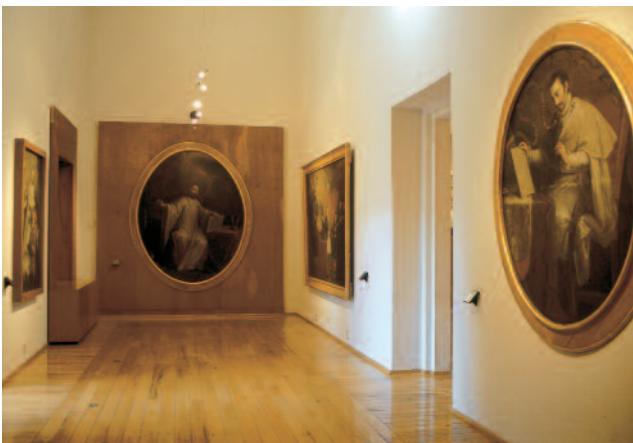
Baltasar de Echaves and Luis Juárez are shown, among those of other artists. In rooms 5 and 6 is *Saint John the Evangelist*, one of a series of paintings of "The Apostolate" by Cristóbal de Villalpando.

Rooms 7 to 10 are filled with outstanding examples of baroque art, among them works by the brothers Juan and Nicolás Rodríguez Juárez, the *Ecce Homo* by José de Ibarra and others by Miguel Cabrera.

Room 11 is dedicated to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European painting, with engravings of the Flemish school and copies of paintings by outstanding painters, like *The Rape of Europe*. The San Carlos College collection of nineteenth-century painting is housed in rooms 12 and 13, with works by Juan Urrechi, like *Lot and His Daughters Escaping from Sodom*, or by Primitivo Miranda, like *The Death of Abel*, and Luis Coto, among others.

Museo de Arte de Querétaro
Allende 14 Sur
Centro Histórico
Querétaro, Querétaro
Phone: 212-23-57 and 212-35-23
www.qromex.org/museo-arte

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Room 9 (left) has extraordinary examples of baroque art. Room 11 (right) is dedicated to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European painting and engraving.