

Reviews



La pintura mural prehispánica en México

Área maya, vol. II, tomos III y IV,

(Pre-Hispanic Mural Painting in Mexico

Maya Area, vol. 2, Books 3 and 4)

UNAM, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas

Mexico City, 2001, Book 3, 336 pp.; Book 4, 262 pp.

These books are the continuation of the review and study of Mayan paintings through the pre-Hispanic Mural Painting in Mexico Project, headed by Beatriz de la Fuente since 1990.

Among the different arts of the pre-Hispanic peoples, mural painting was an important means of communication. Their buildings were covered with stucco and usually painted hematite red. Scenes covered different parts of the buildings but most of the time were found in the interiors. The Mayan culture, just like the other Mesoamerican cultures, used this form of expression to transmit its concepts of the universe and the power of the dynasties and gods.

The historic content and the manufacture of the murals themselves is so important that the project aims to register this universe of color through photography and computers given that, because of its fragility, it is in permanent danger of being lost. Another aim of the project is to study them with multi-disciplinary focuses.

These two books contain 26 articles by researchers who have analyzed the meanings of the scenes depicted from the different perspectives and methodologies of each of the disciplines; the common object is a commitment to recover from the images everything that can render more knowledge about the Mayas.

The studies were done during different periods of field work in archaeological sites in Campeche, Yucatán, Quintana Roo and Chiapas. Each of the researchers gathered the data he or she needed to carry out his/her work, took photographs, observed each image, scrutinized the surroundings, measured the paintings and the buildings, took astronomical measurements and acquired samples of pigments for chemical analysis.



The articles describe in detail the results of these studies, both by members of the project and by specialists from other institutions invited to participate.

In Book 3, then, Jorge Angulo, in his article “Conceptos generales y aspectos controversiales sobre la cultura maya” (General Concepts and Controversial Matters Regarding Mayan Culture), gives an overview of the cultural, economic and natural milieu of the Maya, their cultivation techniques, settlements and architecture, using examples from the murals. Ricardo Bueno, in his “Arqueología de la región Río Bec, Xpuhil, Campeche” (Archaeology of the Río Bec, Xpuhil, Campeche Region), presents a complete study of the emergence of the cities in the Bec River region, with emphasis on the architecture. Lorraine A. Williams-Beck, in “La arquitectura cromática del horizonte clásico en la región de los Chenes, Campeche” (Chromatic Architecture of the Classical Horizon in the Chenes, Campeche Region), refers to sculpture and painting at Chenes-style sites in the northern part

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of the state of Campeche. Rubén Maldonado, in “Los mayas del norte de la península de Yucatán” (The Mayas of the Northern Yucatán Peninsula), uses an archaeological focus to analyze different aspects of the development of the northern area and its pictorial remains. Sonia Lombardo identifies “Los estilos en la pintura mural maya” (Styles in Mayan Mural Painting) that structure this amorphous universe of color. Diana Magaloni, in “Materiales y técnicas de la pintura mural maya” (Materials and Techniques of Mayan Mural Painting), makes a thorough, interesting study of the pigments and the use of lime by the Mayas in their murals. In “El patrimonio arqueológico de Campeche: estudio de las pinturas murales de Ichmac, Xuelén y Chelemi” (Campeche’s Archaeological Patrimony: A Study of the Murals of Ichmac, Xuelén and Chelemi), using chemistry and physics, Tatiana Falcón suggests solutions to a very urgent problem: the dramatic deterioration of three murals. José Francisco Villaseñor presents “Reflexiones en torno al espacio com-

positivo en la pintura mural maya” (Reflections on the Space Used for Composition in Mayan Mural Painting), looking at paintings at the Tulum site. María de Lourdes Navarizo Ornelas develops a unique study about the birds depicted in the murals by doing research into Yucatán Peninsula ecosystems in her article “Las aves en el mundo maya prehispánico” (Birds in the pre-Hispanic Mayan World). María Elena Ruiz Gallut, Jesús Galindo and Daniel Flores authored archaeo-astronomical studies, jointly and individually developing different work that looks at the Mayan cosmic view of architecture and painting. In seven articles that deal with the murals of Chichén Itzá, Mayapán, Tulum, Tancah, Xelhá, Rancho Ina, Xuelén and Palenque, they explore the heavens.

In Book 4, the articles deal with other themes. Alfonso Arellano Hernández, in “Textos y contextos: epigrafía y pintura mural” (Texts and Contexts: Epigraphy and Mural Painting), translates dates and important events related to the governing authorities and gods from the painted inscriptions. Leticia Staines Cicero analyzes the images painted on vault covers found in different sites of the Yucatán Peninsula. The book contains several monographs dealing with archaeological data, the architecture and studies of important murals: “La pintura mural en Yaxchilán, Chiapas” (Mural Painting in Yaxchilán, Chiapas) by Roberto García Moll; “La cromatía de Toniná, Chiapas” (The Chromatics of Toniná, Chiapas) by Maricela Ayala; “Los murales de la tumba del Templo xx Sub de Palenque” (The Murals of Palenque’s Sub 20 Temple) by Merle Green Robertson; “La pintura mural prehispánica en Ek’Balam, Yucatán” (Pre-Hispanic Mural Painting in Ek’Balam, Yucatán) by Leticia Vargas and Víctor Castillo; “La pintura mural de Mayapán” (The Mural Painting of Mayapán) by Alfredo Barrera Rubio and Carlos Peraza; “Cuentas y avatares: un calendario de Venus en Chacchoben, Quintana Roo” (Accounts and the Unforeseen: A Venus Calendar at Chacchoben, Quintana Roo) by María Eugenia Romero, Jesús Mora-Echeverría and Daniel Flores; “La pintura mural en Rancho Ina, Quintana Roo” (Mural Painting in Rancho Ina, Quintana Roo) by Luis Alberto Martos; and “La pintura mural de Xcaret, Quintana Roo” (Mural Painting at Xcaret, Quintana Roo) by María José Con. At the back of this book there is a bibliography of all existing publications about Mayan mural painting.

Each article is illustrated with color photographs, most taken by Ernesto Peñaloza and Javier Hinojosa, sketches, some by Arturo Reséndiz, and artist’s renderings by José

Francisco Villaseñor, as well as some digital work by Ricardo Alvarado. A large part of the photographic material is part of the project's archives, which consist of more than 16,000 photographs in different formats, the registry to date of pre-Hispanic mural painting.

These two books, 3 and 4, come after Books 1 and 2, dealing with Bonampak. This volume will conclude with Book 5, *Catalogue*, currently at press, which includes the registry of the murals still preserved at more than 130 archae-

ological sites in the Maya area. Volume 1 is dedicated to Teotihuacán. Books 3 and 4 were published with the support of the UNAM's General Office of Academic Personnel Affairs, the National Council of Science and Technology and the state governments of Campeche, Chiapas and Quintana Roo.

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