

The Veracruz State Art Museum

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José Justo Montiel, *Lady with Hat, Portrait of Doña Isabel Vivanco Patiño*,
77.5 x 52.5 cm, 1864 (oil on canvas).



The Museo de Arte del Estado de Veracruz (the Veracruz State Art Museum) holds one of our country's most important collections, particularly of nineteenth-century Veracruz art. A product of the genius of outstanding artists who from their own vision and time left us images of exuberant scenery and customs, this collection is the result of the melding in time and space of three important cultures, continents and races: the native indigenous peoples of Mexico, the whites from the Spanish peninsula and the Black peoples of Africa. This important cultural mosaic was the basis for the important patrimony that now belongs to the museum.

THE COLLECTIONS

The museum opened its doors in November 1992 boasting the 700-piece Veracruz state government collection, made up of paintings, sketches and prints from the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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This legacy apparently originated in the late nineteenth century, when the works of Orizaba-born painter José Justo Montiel (1824-1899) that on his death were kept in his hometown workshop were acquired by the state government to create the nucleus of a regional art museum collection. However, the project was not followed through until 1942. After that year, the collection increased considerably and finally, between 1983 and 1986, the Veracruz government acquired most of its works.

The collection includes pieces by the most outstanding Orizaba-born painters trained at Mexico City's San Carlos Academy, among them, nineteenth-century painters José Justo Montiel, Ramón Sagredo (1834-1873), who began his studies in Orizaba in Montiel's atelier, as well as Fidencio Díaz de la Vega and Tiburcio Sánchez; from the first half of the twentieth century, the work of well-known artists and academy graduates Ignacio Rosas (1880-1950) and Gonzalo Argüelles Bringas (1877-1942); Tlacotalpan-born Alberto Fuster (1870-1922) and Salvador Ferrando (1830-1906). Among the distinguished alumni of the San Carlos Academy was Juan Cordero (1824-1884), born in Teziutlán, then part of the state of Veracruz.

The space dedicated to the "Presence of the Academy" exhibits magnificent pieces done in the



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José Justo Montiel, *Saint Juan de Dios Saving a Patient*, 180.5 x 114.5 cm, no date (oil on canvas).

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late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century by masters who exercised great influence on Veracruz's artistic production and left an invaluable legacy, like Eugenio Landesio (1810-1879); José María Velasco (1840-1912); Carlos Rivera (1855-1939); Adolfo Tenorio (1855-1926); Cleofas J. Almanza (1850-1915); Joaquín Clausell (1866-1935); José Obregón (1832-1902); the Spaniard José Escudero y Espronceda, active in Mexico between 1870 and 1900; the Catalans José Cusachs (1851-1908), who would gain international renown as a painter of battle scenes, and Joan Bernardet y Aguilar (1860-1932), who arrived in Mexico in the late nineteenth century and lived in Veracruz until his death.

In addition to the paintings, the museum also boasts different collections of nineteenth-century visiting artists, among whom were the sketch artists and European engravers who illustrated the work of Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) (Marchais, Bouquet and Langlois) and that of the English collector William Bullock (1795-1840) (Brisou and Marlet); the Germans Karl Nebel (1805-1855) and Johann Moritz Rugendas (1802-1858); the Italians Claudio Linati (1790-1832) and Pedro Gualdi (active in Mexico between 1840 and 1850), whose scientific interest or love of adventure prompted them to make the New World known in Europe, with a visual testimony of admiration for and wonder at the culture and beauty

of Veracruz's landscape, particularly places like Citlaltépetl or the Orizaba Peak.

Veracruz's scenery is depicted in two publications commemorating the inauguration of the Mexico-Veracruz railroad: the *Historia del Ferrocarril Mexicano* (The History of the Mexican Railroad) (1874) and the *Álbum del Ferrocarril Mexicano* (The Album of the Mexican Railroad) (1877). The former contains lithographic transfers of photographs and the latter, chromolithographs based on paintings by Casimiro Castro (1826-1889). The participating artists delved into modernity and aesthetic revaluation based on the images of the most outstanding landscape artists of the second half of the nineteenth century.

In addition to excellent painters, experts in one or several branches of scientific knowledge integrate utility and beauty, science and art with a positivist ideal in the depiction of the railroad, incorporating the machine into the exuberant Veracruz scenery.

THE BUILDING

The building housing the museum is the old Oratory of Saint Philip Neri, built in 1767 to worship Our Lady of Guadalupe, and abandoned in 1860.

It is made up of two cloisters on two levels and three patios, taking up 4,000 square meters, and is one of the most representative end-of-century creations, with its rich decoration in mortar relief done by indigenous artisans. The space adapted as a museum currently has nine rooms.

The building has witnessed important historical events and has been modified several times because of the constant earthquakes and changes in its use. An 1819 earthquake did great damage and four decades later the Oratorians abandoned it completely when the Reform Laws secularized Church properties.

In 1862, Napoleon III's French troops used the oratory as a hospital. But another series of earthquakes left the building in ruins in 1864 and 1865;



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Elsie Montiel

for this reason it was necessary to demolish and rebuild a large part of the construction. At that time, buttresses were built using neo-classical decoration on the balconies of the central patio, enriching the building's particular style.

In 1867, a hospice for physically challenged children was set up in the building and a hospital established in 1873, later to become the Ignacio de la Llave Civic Hospital. For the next 100 years, it operated as a hospital, with part of the second cloister in use as a women's prison. In 1938, the Civic Hospital rented a large part of the first cloister to found the first Mexican Social Security Institute hospital in the state of Veracruz.

The Civic Hospital closed its doors because of the enormous damage from the 1973 earthquakes; the building in ruins would later be used as an amphitheater, a municipal warehouse and a storage facility for historical documents.

It was in 1990 when a group of Orizaba residents promoted the restoration of the building that would then become a cultural center; and finally it was decided that it should hold the important Veracruz state government art collection in order to exhibit the most outstanding of Veracruz's artis-

tic production. It holds the work of great masters, who dealt with an enormous variety of topics with different techniques and artistic currents and a characteristic style of their own.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

The museum offers different activities for the whole family: "Puppets Invite You to the Museum" is a guided tour led by puppets handled by the Arcoiris Group every Sunday at noon; the Cri Cri Regional Playroom, open from Tuesday to Saturday from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.; guided tours for groups; and a wide-ranging cultural program of music, literature, theater and dance, as well as academic activities, festivals, seminars, courses and art fora. **MM**

MUSEO DE ARTE DEL ESTADO DE VERACRUZ
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