



THE SPACE AND ITS CONTEXT

The University Contemporary Art Museum (MUAC) opened its doors in November 2008 after more than two years of conceptualization and construction. Located in the University Cultural Center, the MUAC eloquently expresses the National Autonomous University of Mexico's commitment to cultural exten-

sion, and a response to the on-going, lasting demands for spaces for the arts with structure and infrastructure. Architect Teodoro González de León, experienced in museum architecture, designed the MUAC. He conceived its location as part of a harmonious, articulated cultural space that also took into account the privileged natural, geographical surroundings that the development of University City managed to preserve in the face of Mexico City's overwhelming growth.

The MUAC's design reconciled this transparent dialogue with its surroundings with the demands for space and installations needed for a contempo-

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Photo of the facade by Pedro Hiriart, courtesy of the MUAC. Photos of interiors by José Antonio Ruiz, courtesy of the MUAC.

The University Contemporary Art Museum

A Living Space

Jorge Reynoso Pohlenz*



rary art museum. Of necessity, the building is large, but that size is not intimidating to the visitor. Instead of a labyrinthine, oppressive vastness of infinite sequential rooms, the public moves through corridors that can be considered opportunities for reflection during their journey between exhibition halls, where they also come upon patios and visual escapes to the outside of the museum.

In our Spanish language, there is no completely positive connotation for the words “idly meander” or “loiter,” but it is this open receptive attitude without a fixed destination that the MUAC invites

its visitors to adopt. Anyone who goes into the non-public areas—and we will talk about some of these later—will discover that its offices, warehouses, workshops and equipment make the MUAC an exceptional space for operating, producing and presenting exhibitions. The idea here is not to talk about the number of square meters the museum has for exhibitions, or the kilometers of electrical installations, or the number of workers or of art works it has, but rather to turn our attention to the description of the programs that seek to set it in motion.

THE CURATORIAL PROGRAM

Today, museums have to respond to intense demands and expectations from society, while the public expects constant, attractive updating of their exhibitions. This means running the risk that content will echo more the moment and occasion than a process of profound, well-founded critical reflection. In the sphere of today's public opinion and media, contemporary art museums are simultaneously famous and controversial. But frequently, that fame and controversy do not extend to broader, more all-



inclusive terms that spark a real dialogue between the experiences of art and collective life, a life that is complex and in which art allows us to broaden our horizons.

Taking into consideration its being part of the university, the MUAC team thinks of art as one of the transcendental means for knowing the world and strives for its programming to be a means for activating significant experiences, regardless of quantitative or media successes. A curators' seminar was set up to articulate a coherent program of exhibitions, and, based on dialogue, discussion and collegiate reflection, it has structured the programming into curatorial cycles. While not ignoring the international art scene, these cycles seek to orient the program from a national and Latin American standpoint, proposing artists, works, projects and ideas that resonate with the history and thinking of other places

and moments from the standpoint of a university, a country and a time.

More than a single theme, the cycles unfold a series of lines of thinking that, starting from art, link up with other disciplines and facets of today's culture. The third cycle, entitled "Facts and Deliriums: Underpinnings, Material and Work," is currently underway. Its exhibitions revolve around the ways in which today's art depicts production processes, re-ordering the idea of what constitutes a work of art.

Included in the programming are individual and collective exhibitions, shows conceived by the MUAC

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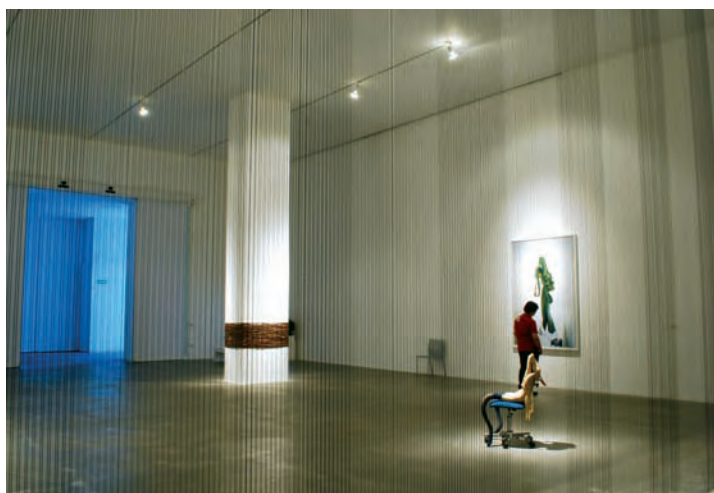


team, curatorial co-productions and external shows akin to the outlines of each cycle. In the context of the bicentennial celebrations of the emancipation of Latin America and the centennial of the National University of Mexico, the cycle "The Phantom of Freedom" will begin in late 2010 and continue into 2011, and will include exhibitions on the reflections and repercussions of memory, reality and the libertarian utopia in today's art and aesthetics.

THE COLLECTION

The MUAC boasts a collection of art produced in the last half century that became part of the patrimony of the university. The first works in this collection came from the exhibitions at the University Museum of Science and Art (MUCA) beginning in 1960, mainly from donations. In 1999, the first efforts were made to design a systematic, critical policy for expanding the collection, but it was not until 2005 that the policy was consolidated, intentionally coinciding with the creation of the MUAC, by establishing

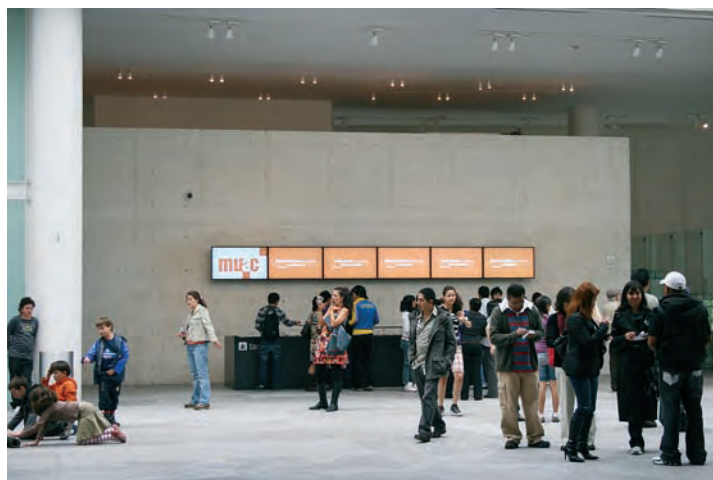
Programming is structured into curatorial cycles that link art with other disciplines and facets of today's cultures, rather than by single themes.



a system for the acquisition of recent Mexican art in accordance with the UNAM's scrupulous collegial regulations.

Mexico has few public collections of modern and contemporary art, which makes this initiative fundamental. At the same time it is in step with an institution which, in addition to including recent art as part of its offering in cultural extension, has schools for teaching art and research institutes for the visual arts.

Before the MUAC existed, there were no optimal spaces for storing these collections, a problem solved by including two warehouses for the collection, another for works in transit and a restoration workshop, all with ideal temperature and humidity controls and security conditions. Augmenting the museum's collection is a long-term project aimed at making it representative of the paths taken by Mexican art in recent decades. At the same time that this university collection is catalogued, preserved, documented and researched, the museum has partnered with collectors like Patrick Charpenel and the Grupo



Corpus, who have generously donated works to MUAC, benefitting and enriching both research and curatorial projects.

As mentioned above, the MUAC's programming is based on cycles that allow its team and the public to renew their perspectives about art, its creators and its contexts. In this dynamic, no space for exhibiting the permanent collection was conceived of, but rather, parts of it are integrated into the different exhibits and, once a year, an exhibition is held exclusively to show the permanent collection, making it possible to constantly think about and reconsider its works.

SPACE AS A PRODUCER OF KNOWLEDGE

The MUAC team has established the premise of thinking of its space not only as a means for exhibition and storage, but also as a place that produces knowl-



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edge, a principle that links together the museology extension, educational and academic programs. Education is conceived of not as a unidirectional process, but as the dialogue with museum visitors. The MUAC educational liaison team does not limit its activities to the large museum-pedagogical space called the Agora, but moves into the exhibit halls, broadening the scope of its activities from the usual child visitors to other kinds of museum-goers who are part of the plurality of the university cultural spheres. The “Links” program has been particularly effective: through it, students participate in mediation processes, contributing their enthusiasm to museum activities after intense training in museum-pedagogical techniques and in curatorial content.

Visitors who wish to broaden their informational contexts or have further dialogue can use the Experimental Space for the Construction of the Senses, where they have access to wide-ranging documentary and bibliographical information, and sessions

—called “conversatoria”— are held to discuss the exhibits and watch audiovisuals. With no intention whatsoever of overwhelming the public with activities, periodically, series of lectures, round table discussions and film and video showings are offered, seeking to broaden the impact of the curatorial cycles. In addition to the Experimental Space, the MUAC has an auditorium, set up and equipped to carry out very different kinds of performances and musical activities; a conference room; a shop-bookshop with recent publications about contemporary art and Mexican avant-garde design; plus a Space for Sound Experimentation. The latter is a recognition of the process of creativity in the visual arts extending to other paths of the senses. Its acoustical conditions and equipment make it possible to optimally play sound recordings on 24 channels. The creation of this space, inaugurated in November 2009, was accompanied by a laboratory project to bring together creators and sound technicians.

The public can consult specific or specialized materials on recent art at the Arkheia Research and Documentation Center, which boasts a growing library and document archives contributed by specialists like Olivier Debrouse —who conceived of Arkheia— and Edgardo Ganado, or outstanding artists like Felipe Ehrenberg. Arkheia aspires to actively participate in a process that would allow access to a documentary history of Latin American art and permit its wide circulation, taking on tasks of cataloging and digitalization as well as setting up collaborative networks with other similar institutions.

With regard to the production of specialized knowledge, using its Expanded Campus program, the MUAC has launched two seminars on critical theory headed by students and professionals dedicated to different aspects of recent art, in collaboration with the UNAM’s art history graduate program. Coinciding with the cycle “The Phantom of Freedom,” an international

seminar will be organized about emancipatory and revolutionary aesthetics.

At certain times of day, a seminar participant might cross paths with a family visiting an exhibition, every member of which might have a different—even opposed— opinion about what he or she saw and experienced. The museum is also a wealth of things that happen inside and outside its exhibition halls. **M**

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Insurgentes Sur 3000
Centro Cultural Universitario, Del. Coyoacán, C.P. 04510
Phone: 56 22 69 72
Open Wednesday, Friday and Sunday
10 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Thursday and Saturday 12 a.m. to 8 p.m.
Mex\$40
Sunday, admission is free.



Arkheia Research and Documentation Center.



Museum gift shop.



Nube Siete Restaurant.