

# A Century in the Cultural Life of the UNAM



Chaplin exhibition at the Tlatelolco University Cultural Center.

**T**he National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) is undoubtedly our country's foremost cultural project as well as one of the most important in Latin America. As it has for 100 years, in this early part of the twenty-first century, the UNAM has reaffirmed one of its most significant vocations: extending the benefits of culture as much as possible.

## THE MOST RECENT UNIVERSITY MUSEUMS

In 2008, the University Contemporary Art Museum (MUAC) opened its doors, housed in a splendid work of architecture

Unless otherwise specified, all photos in this article are by Barry Domínguez/UNAM Office for Cultural Outreach Communications Department.

by Teodoro González de León built in the University Cultural Center to hold the country's most important public collection of contemporary art.

A year before, in October 2007, the Tlatelolco University Cultural Center was inaugurated in what had previously been Mexico's Ministry of Foreign Relations, in northern Mexico City. The UNAM installed there the emblematic 1968 Memorial, an informative, educational space with a historiographic display that gives the viewer an idea of the scope of the 1968 student movement, an epic-making episode in Mexico's modern history.

Two years before that, in 2005, the university recovered the Echo Experimental Museum, a legendary building of contemporary architecture conceived in 1952 by German sculptor and architect Mathias Goeritz for experimenting

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with the visual arts. In addition, in May 2010, the “El Cho-po” University Museum was re-inaugurated as a center for alternative university extension and community activities. Its architectural renovation recovered its legendary iron structure, adapting it to the needs of this century.

All these endeavors are part of an almost century-old institutional program to consolidate one of the most important cultural infrastructures among the world’s universities.

A FOUNDER OF PROJECTS FOR CULTURAL OUTREACH

For a century, the UNAM has almost naturally taken on the responsibility for creating artistic and cultural projects that have been very important nationally and internationally.

iversity City a World Heritage Treasure. Carlos III University of Madrid recognizes TV UNAM as the best cultural channel in Latin America.

▪ 2008

The University Contemporary Art Museum (MUAC) opens its doors. The UNAM is ranked by *The Times* of London in its World University Rankings as the best institution of higher learning in Latin America, as well as by the Ranking Web of World Universities developed by the Higher Council of Scientific Research, based in Spain.

▪ 2009

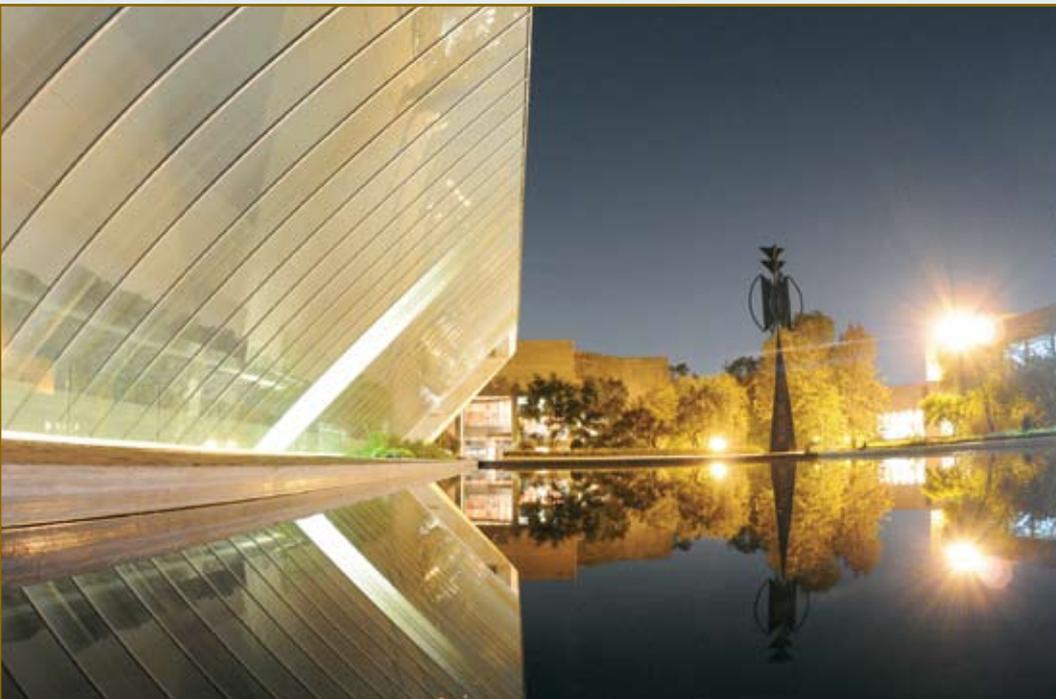
On June 10, the UNAM is given the Prince of Asturias Prize for Communication and the Humanities. On October 23, Rector José Narro Robles accepts the award in Oviedo, Spain.



▪ 2010

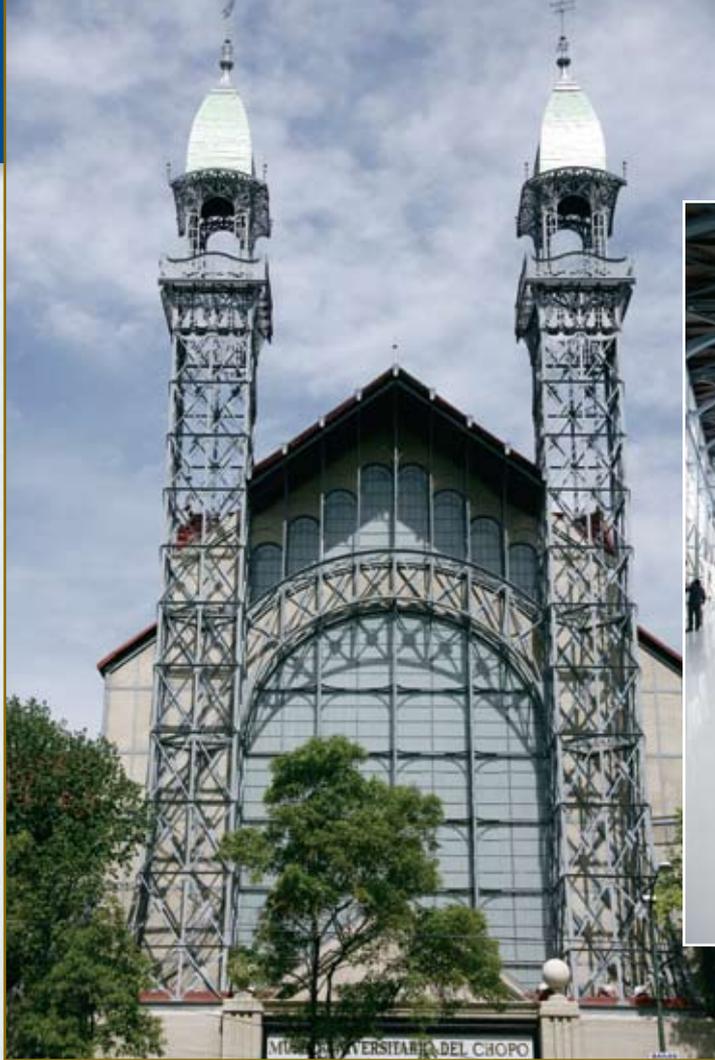
Today, the UNAM has installations in 20 states throughout Mexico, including six campuses and 17 schools in Mexico City’s metropolitan area and five poles of regional development in Michoacán, Querétaro, Morelos, Baja California, and Yucatán; as well as in four states in the United States (California, Texas, Washington, and Illinois), one in Canada, and another in Spain.

*Isabel Morales*  
**Staff Writer**



Gaceta UNAM

The University Contemporary Art Museum.



The "El Chopo" University Museum façade.



Interior.

**In May 2010, the "El Chopo" University Museum was re-inaugurated as a center for alternative university extension and community activities. Its architectural renovation recovered its legendary iron structure.**

The first works by the great masters of the Mexican School of Painting (José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, and Edmundo O'Gorman) were painted on its walls in the first half of the twentieth century. In the 1960s, its galleries offered space to painters from what was called the Generation of the Break, who opposed the nationalist artistic movement.<sup>1</sup>

In another sphere of the arts, the UNAM philharmonic orchestra, OFUNAM, is prestigious worldwide and has been offering regular concert programs for more than 70 years. It has performed every season since 1976 in its habitual home, the Nezahualcōyotl Concert Hall.

Mexican contemporary theater was also born in one of the UNAM's cultural venues: the House on the Lake of the Old Chapultepec Forest, where a group of young dramatists,

among them Juan José Gurrola, Juan José Arreola, Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, Juan Soriano, and Héctor Mendoza, came to renew the Mexican stage with more avant-garde proposals.

We also owe the UNAM the foundation of Latin America's first cultural radio station, which today continues broadcasting intelligent, creative radio programming on 96.2 FM and 860 AM. We also must not overlook the television programming of the Cultural University Channel, which broadcasts on the main cable systems nationwide.

This institution of higher learning has one of the world's most important stocks of film because of its work in recovering and preserving world and Mexican film history. The UNAM's Film Archive currently has more than 35 000 titles in its collection.

## Main Media Outlets

**Radio UNAM** began broadcasting June 14, 1937. Since its inauguration, this pioneer in cultural radio in the Americas has had the mission of teaching and disseminating culture. In fulfilling it, it has enjoyed the collaboration of the most important voices in Mexican culture and letters. Today, it broadcasts 24 hours a day on 96.1 FM and 860 AM, as well as on its website <http://www.radiounam.mx/site/>.

**TV UNAM.** On October 24, 2005, TV UNAM began broadcasting from its own installations, although as early as 1960 through other stations, it had already been airing television series for educational and research purposes. In 1988, it moved into its own building with studios, editing rooms, and laboratories with cutting-edge technology. Centering its programming on national issues, it broadcasts diverse series on artistic, scientific, social, and cultural topics, plus newscasts about the most important university events and activities. It also offers a wide variety of programming from around the world. For the moment, TV UNAM's own signal only goes out on cable, but on internet, it is free.

**Gaceta UNAM** (the University Gazette). The university's official publication was created August 23, 1954. It reports on UNAM cultural and academic activities, in addition to short articles on the news about the university community's scientific and artistic activities (<http://www.dgcs.unam.mx/gacetaweb>).

**The UNAM's website** ([www.unam.mx](http://www.unam.mx)) has won many prizes and is classified among the 100 best academic websites in the world. It offers access to complete information about study plans, cultural activities, and even online training. It also offers links to more than 200 digital scientific research and popular publications, publishing catalogues, and virtual libraries with tens of thousands of titles. Users can also make on-line purchases and enjoy digital services like e-mail and hosting in the UNAM server. Plus, the UNAM boasts approximately 200 websites managed by its different institutions.

**Descarga Cultura UNAM** (UNAM Culture Download). This is a free site, open to the public, where scientific and artistic multimedia files can be downloaded: readings by well-known writers, music, theater, lectures, interviews, and courses. Go there: <http://www.descarga.cultura.unam.mx/>.

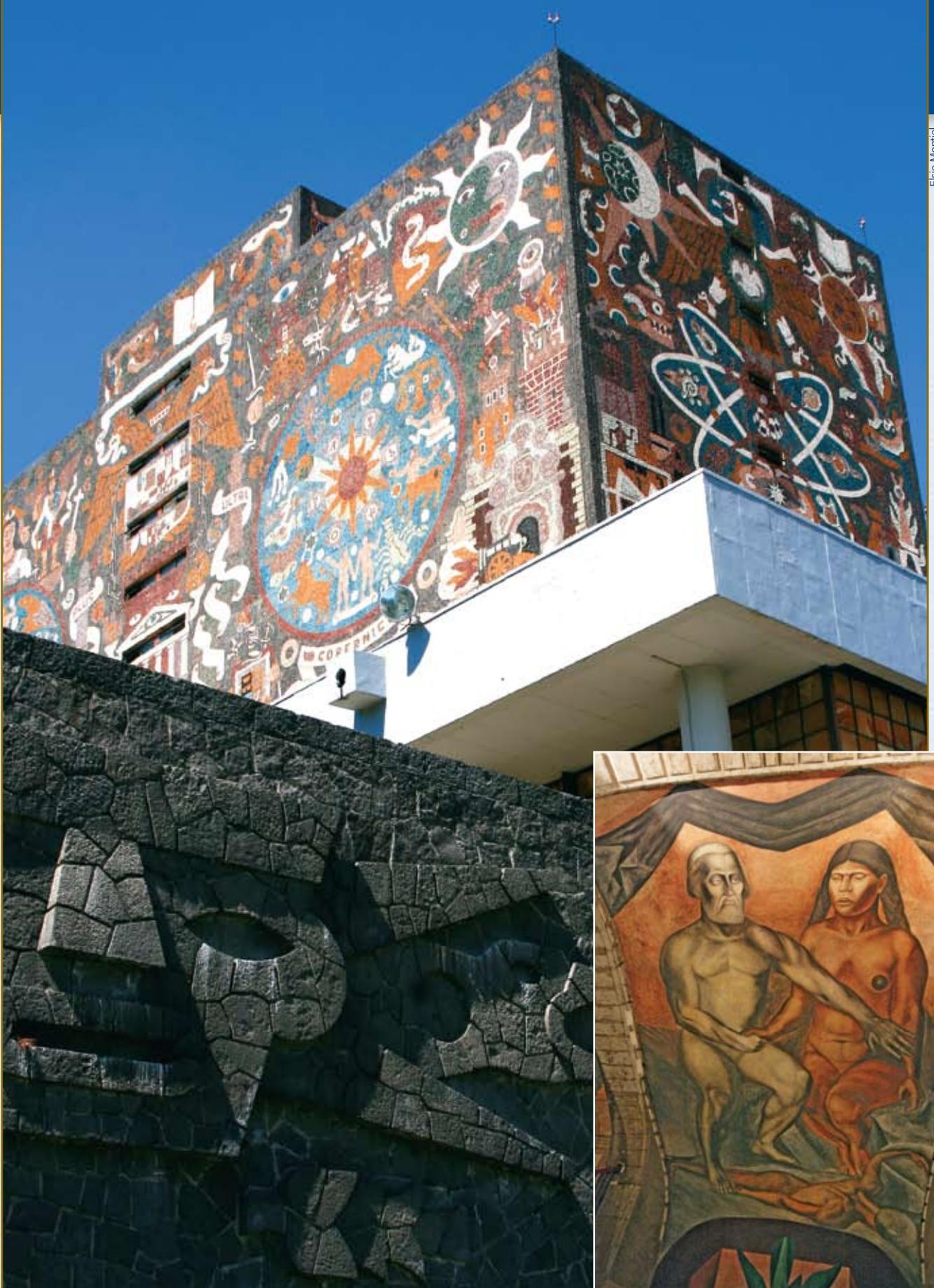
The prestigious UNAM Philharmonic Orchestra is known worldwide and has performed every season since 1976 in its habitual home, the Nezahualcóyotl Concert Hall.



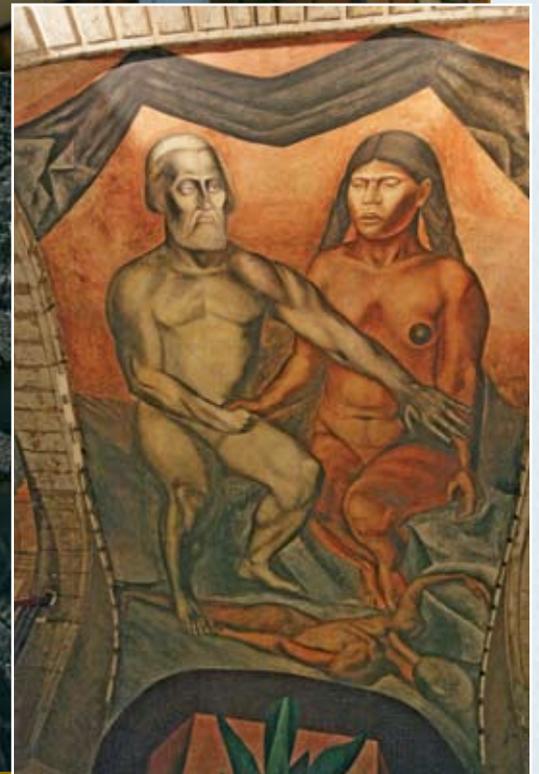
Concert in the Carlos Chávez Hall.



OFUNAM concert at the re-opening of the Nezahualcóyotl Concert Hall.



The Central Library.



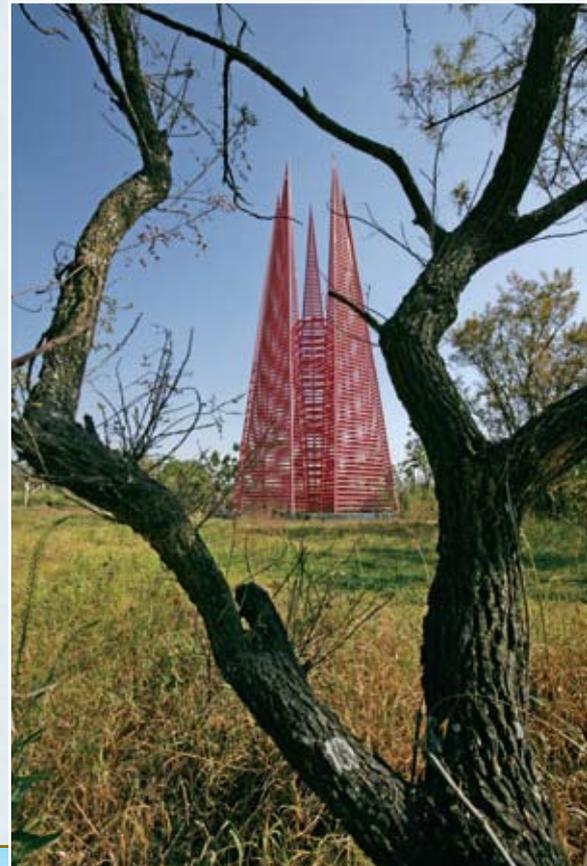
Detail of José Clemente Orozco's mural at the Old College of San Ildefonso.

The important literary and publishing efforts that our university has performed also deserve special mention. Today, it is the most prolific publishing house in Latin America, capable of putting out more than 1 400 new publications a year and boasting a network of bookstores at different locations in Mexico City.

SPACES FOR CULTURAL LIFE:  
THE UNIVERSITY CULTURAL CENTER

It is the responsibility of the Office for Cultural Outreach to maintain the prestige the UNAM has achieved in fostering cultural life. This task is carried out through a complex sub-system of 15 offices that program a wide array of cultural offerings, including cinema, music of all kinds, theater, dance, visual arts, literary activities, radio, television, workshops, and extension courses in many fields. A large part of the activities are planned for the University Cultural Center, conceived in the mid-1970s as a monumental work, built on the lava beds of the Pedregal area. It is a totally unprecedented space in the university cultural milieu, where each art form has an ideal space. It should be mentioned that maintenance on this complex was completed last April to preserve its functionality and architectural beauty. In this space, the Cultural Outreach Office offers the university community and society at large a wide diversity of cultural activities every day.

At the Sculpture Walk and Sculpture Space, visitors can enjoy the architecture, and the natural beauty of the vegetation and the volcanic rock blend harmoniously.



Elsie Momtiel



*The Crown of Pedregal*, sculpture by Mathias Goeritz (above right). View of part of the Sculpture Walk (below).

## History of the Puma Logo and the University Cheer



The UNAM's sports logo is the puma, alluding to the keen wits, intelligence, speed, and agility of the university's sportsmen and women. It was created by Manuel Andrade Rodríguez, nicknamed "Andrade the Bird." In blue and gold, it combines two elements: an abstract form of the letter "u" and a figurative, stylized representation of a puma's face. The puma is the university's mascot and represents it at all sports events and championships.

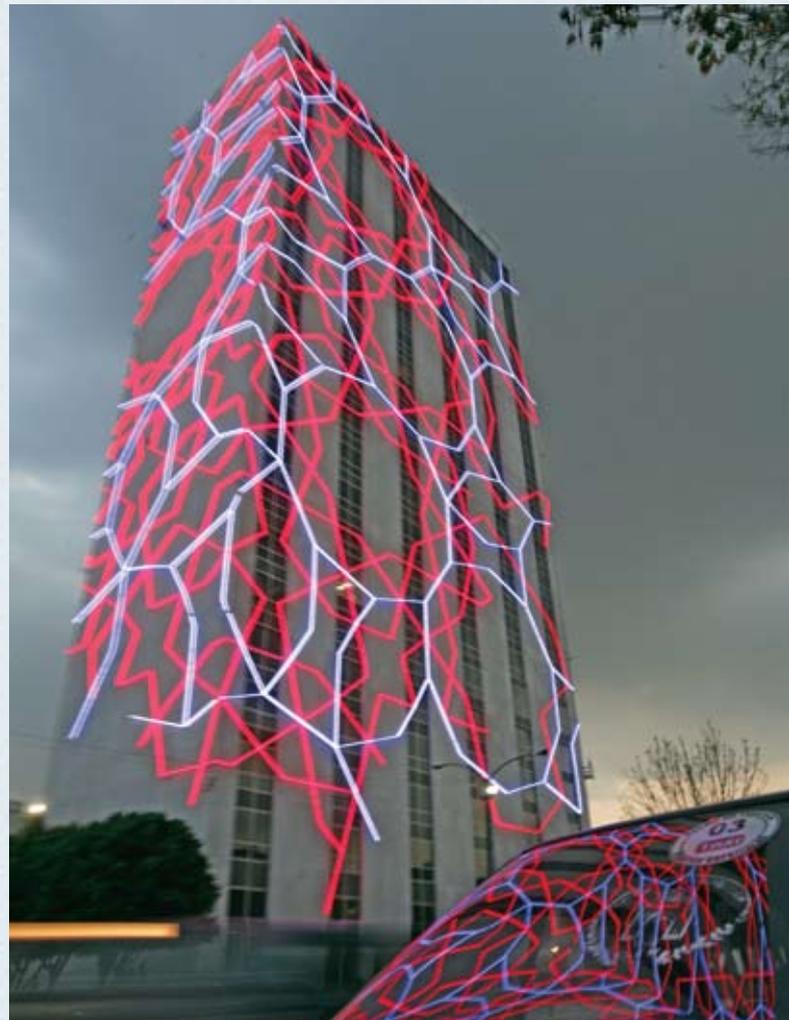
The university cheer is famous in Mexico: "Goya!" It originated in the 1940s and refers to the moment when high school students used to yell "Goya!" in reference to the Goya Movie Theater: what they meant was that everyone was supposed to cut class and go to the movies. Over time, this call has become identified with the UNAM community. It is shouted equally enthusiastically everywhere from celebrating a student passing a professional examination to cheering on the soccer team in the University Olympic Stadium. Listen to the complete cheer at <http://www.clubpumasunam.com/index.php/portal/sonidos>.

### *The Rooms, the Theater, and the Forum*

The Nezahualcóyotl Concert Hall is perhaps the most important in Latin America because of its beauty and the perfection of its acoustics. The Juan Ruiz de Alarcón Theater is an ideal venue for classical theater. The Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz Forum hosts the most outstanding plays of experimental and intimate theater. The Carlos Chávez Hall hosts some of the most experienced groups of chamber music. The Miguel Covarrubias Hall is a great stage for the country's dance repertoire and home of the UNAM Choreography Workshop. The José Revueltas and Julio Bracho Movie Theaters, for their part, program the best in world cinema.

Part of this architectural complex is made up by the Julio Torri Bookstore, the Azul y Oro Cafeteria, and, very outstandingly, the University Theater Center and the National Library and Periodicals Library, along the sides of which are the Sculpture Walk and Sculpture Space, leisure spaces any visitor should see, where the architecture and the natural beauty of the vegetation and the volcanic rock blend harmoniously.

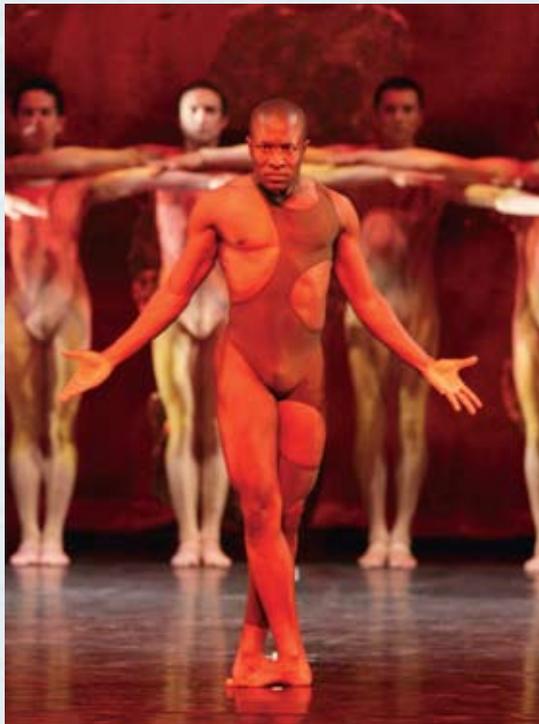
In addition to its theaters, visitors to the University Cultural Center can enjoy open-air performances by the Commedia Cart Travelling Theater Company, whose specialty is classical theater.



*Xipe-Totec*, a light installation by Thomas Glassford, at the Tlatelolco University Cultural Center.



Ephemeral Mural Contest. Graffiti artists 100 years on.

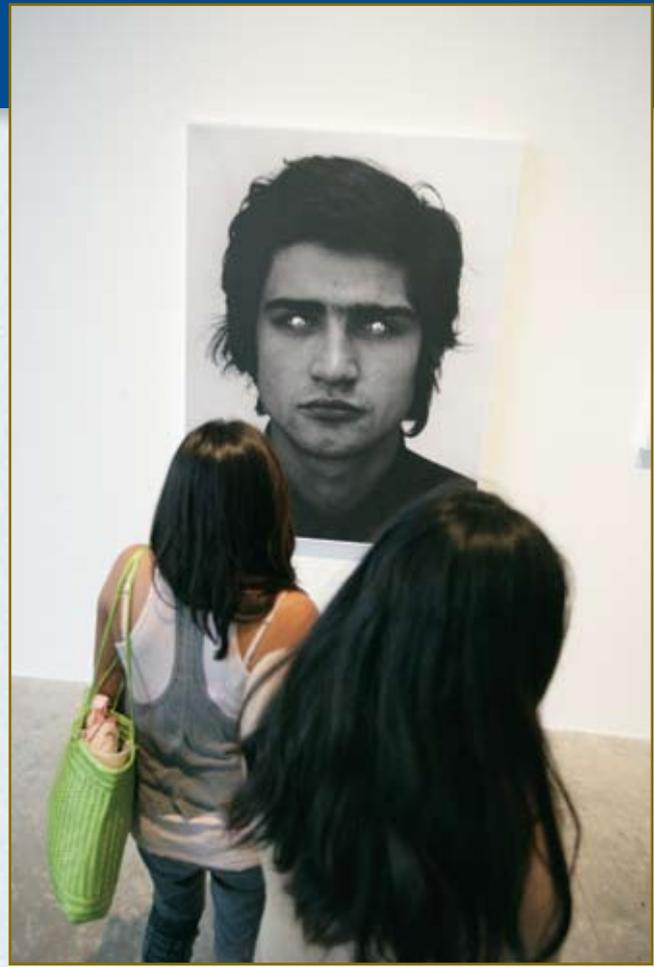


Fortieth anniversary of the UNAM Choreography Workshop.

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The Commedia Cart Travelling Theater Company.



Ergo Materia, Arte Povera Exhibition.

**Scattered around the city, the UNAM has other spaces where it programs a vast array of cultural offerings, among them the Juan José Arreola House on the Lake, and the Old College of San Ildefonso.**

#### OFF-CAMPUS CULTURE

Scattered around the city, the UNAM has other spaces where it programs a vast array of cultural offerings, among them the aforementioned Juan José Arreola House on the Lake, a historic building where culture has been disseminated for almost half a century; the Old College of San Ildefonso, currently a museum famed for its monumental architecture and historic value, where world-class exhibitions are held; the Santa Catarina Theater, located in a traditional old house in the historic center of Coyoacán, which offers the theater-going public more experimental works; and we must not forget the Museum of the Palace of Autonomy or the Roma-Neigh-

borhood University Museum of Science, a gallery for contemporary artists' work.

#### COMMITMENT TO THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE: THE UNAM ON THE INTERNET

In accordance with technological advances and today's communications needs, the UNAM Cultural Outreach Office has proposed to avail itself intensively of the benefits of the internet by launching a series of innovative projects in the use of technology, like the portal [www.descargacultura.unam.mx](http://www.descargacultura.unam.mx) and the electronic publications put out by the Office for Literature, a poetry periodical, and reading materials.

The podcast portal [www.descargacultura.unam.mx](http://www.descargacultura.unam.mx) offers academic extension and cultural audio materials that can be downloaded to portable equipment and PCs to take with you and be listened to anywhere, at any time. This way, the student can make use of his/her transportation and leisure time to listen to a story, essay, or a novel being read, attend a

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lecture, listen to a play, enjoy a concert, or review a topic, just as easily as downloading music from other online sites.

Outstanding among the materials produced especially for this portal are the readings of their own works by renowned Mexican and Ibero-American writers like Elena Poniatowska, Vicente Leñero, Juan Villoro, Hugo Gutiérrez Vega, Fernando Savater, Antonio Skármeta, Sergio Ramírez, Carlos Montemayor, and Víctor Hugo Rascón Banda, among others. Fundamental works of Mexican and universal literature can also be downloaded, including pieces by authors like Rosario Castellanos, Oscar Wilde, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Anton Chekhov, Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, Horacio Quiroga, or Leopoldo García-Alas y Ure-



View of the Central Library in University City.

### UNAM Publishing



The university has a fundamental presence in the publishing world of Mexico and Latin America. Without a doubt, it is the world's largest Spanish-language publishing house. In 2009, the UNAM published 2 113 titles, including 1 216 books, 353 e-books, and 544 issues of periodicals. In addition, the number of pamphlets, manuals, guidebooks, didactic materials, and catalogues came to 1 894. For the university's centennial, it published the *Catálogo de Revistas Científicas y Arbitradas de la UNAM* (Catalogue of the UNAM's Scientific, Peer Reviewed Magazines), both in a print version, and a virtual, digital version (at [www.revistas.unam.mx](http://www.revistas.unam.mx)), which includes 108 magazines covering all fields of knowledge. The university also has several popular magazines dealing with science, culture, literature, and other topics of both general and special interest. All the publications are distributed through a network of UNAM libraries (six in Mexico City, one in Campeche, and another in Mérida), at the most important national and international book fairs, and by many of the most prestigious bookstores in Mexico and abroad.

ña, also known as "Clarín." In addition, the Office for Cultural Outreach has a digital billboard on the internet ([www.cultura.unam.mx](http://www.cultura.unam.mx)) where the UNAM offers everyone some of the visual, sound, graphic, and text materials that make up the institution's vast cultural offering. **UNAM**

### UNAM Office for Cultural Outreach Communications Department

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>This is was a heterogeneous group of Mexican and foreign artists living in Mexico who in the 1950s began to react against what they perceived as worn-out values of the Mexican School of Painting, whose nationalist, left-leaning, revolutionary themes had been the hegemonic artistic current in the country since the outbreak of the 1910 Revolution. This generation incorporated more cosmopolitan, abstract, and supposedly a-political values in their work, seeking, among other things, to expand its themes and style beyond the limits imposed by muralism and its derivatives. Among the members of this current are well-known painters like Rufino Tamayo, Manuel Felguérez, José Luis Cuevas, Pedro Coronel, Günther Gerzo, Vlady, Remedios Varo, Mathias Goeritz, Francisco Zúñiga, Alberto Gironella, Vicente Rojo, Juan Soriano, and Francisco Toledo. [Editor's Note.]