

Folkloristic Cosmopolitanism: Mexico's Indigenist Architectures at World's Fairs and International Exhibitions

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Abstract

In 1929, Mexico presented itself at the Ibero-American Exposition in Seville, Spain, with a pavilion architecture that replicated the aesthetics of 'Mexican antiquity', referring back to ancient Mexican construction types. Starting from this staging, this article examines the indigenist exhibition architectures in terms of the strategies used to represent the indigenous in the context of establishing a national canon of aesthetic forms. The example of Mexico enables a discussion on how 'peripheral modernism' was imagined at international exhibitions and world's fairs, how it – in turn – was linked to exoticisation and auto-

exoticisation, and which forms of staging were used, especially since no similarly large exhibitions took place in Mexico itself. In broad terms, the pivotal question is to what extent the world's fair format provided a unique stage for negotiations between the poles of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, tradition and modernity, periphery and center. A special focus will be on the question in which architectural and artistic configurations these negotiation processes became visible. This entails retracing and reappraising the contexts of such indigenist aesthetics.

Introduction

[1] In 1929, Mexico presented itself at the Ibero-American Exposition in Seville, Spain, with a pavilion architecture that replicated the aesthetics of 'Mexican antiquity', referring back to ancient Mexican construction types. Starting from this staging, this article examines the indigenist exhibition architectures in terms of the strategies used to represent the indigenous in the context of establishing a national canon of aesthetic forms. The example of Mexico enables a discussion on how 'peripheral modernism' was imagined at international exhibitions and world's fairs, how it – in turn – was linked to exoticisation and auto-exoticisation, and which forms of staging were used, especially since no similarly large exhibitions took place in Mexico itself.¹ In broad terms, the pivotal question is to what extent the world's fair format provided a unique stage for negotiations between the poles of nationalism and cosmopolitanism, tradition and modernity, periphery and center. A special focus will be on the question in which architectural and artistic configurations these negotiation processes became visible. This entails retracing and reappraising the contexts of such indigenist aesthetics.

Seville 1929

[2] The international Ibero-American Exhibition was held in Seville in 1929 to coincide with the world's fair in Barcelona. The *Plaza de España* was the focal point and visual axis of the exhibition site, located in the public *Parque de María Luísa*, while the pavilions of the invited North and South American nations, as well as that of Portugal, were distributed throughout the exhibition grounds; the exhibition design imitated land and sea maps from the time of the Spanish 'voyages of discovery' (Fig. 1).

¹ Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, whose work is fundamental to my reflections here, has provided a nuanced study on Mexico's role in world's fairs: Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs. Crafting a Modern Nation*, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1996. For a shorter overview of Mexico's participation in world's fairs, see: Susan Douglas, "Mexico in World Expositions and Fairs" (30 July 2018), in: *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History* (online), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.479> (accessed September 25, 2023) Fundamental to the presentations of Latin America at large in the 19th century is the work of Alejandra Uslenghi: Alejandra Uslenghi, *Latin America at Fin-de-Siècle Universal Exhibitions. Modern Cultures of Visuality*, New York 2016.



1 [Map](#) of the Ibero-American Exhibition in Seville, 1929. From: *Sevilla. Exposición Iberoamericana 1929–1930. Guía Oficial*, Barcelona 1929

[3] The Mexican pavilion was assigned number 36 and was located behind the *Palacio de Bellas Artes*, the art exhibition building, and next to the Brazilian pavilion at the far end of the park. Built on an x-shaped ground plan, the pavilion was designed by Mexican architect Manuel Amábilis² in a neo-Maya style, aesthetically inspired by the Maya-Toltec culture of the Puuc region of the Yucatán Peninsula,³ where the architect was from (Fig. 2). Amábilis collaborated with two Yucatán artists: Leopoldo Tommasi López created the sculptural programme in hewn stone and plaster, while Victor Manuel Reyes was responsible for the murals.

² On the competition for the construction of the Mexican pavilion, see the detailed accounts given by Tenorio-Trillo (1996), 223-232 and Martha Fernández, "El pabellón de México para la Exposición Iberoamericana de Sevilla de 1929. Su rescate y restauración", in: *Imágenes. Revista electrónica del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* (2006), http://www.esteticas.unam.mx/revista_imagenes/dearchivos/dearch_fernandez01.html (accessed September 25, 2023).

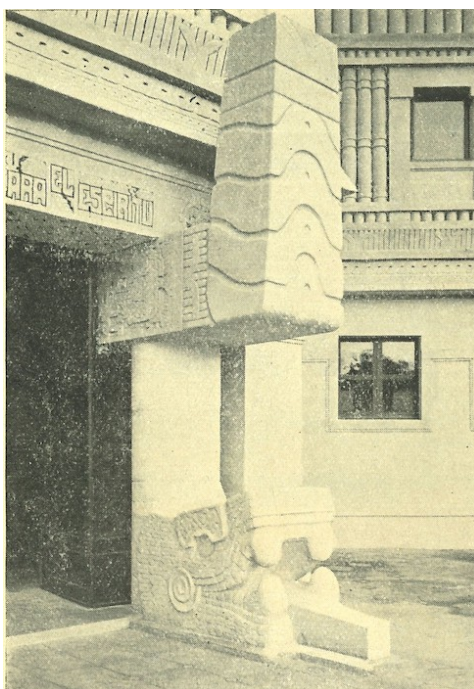
³ There is some debate about the Toltec influence on Late and Postclassic Maya culture, see: Susan Gillespie, "Toltecs, Tula and Chichén Itzá. The Development of an Archaeological Myth", in: *Twin Tollans: Chichén Itzá, Tula, and the Epiclassic to Early Postclassic Mesoamerican World*, eds. Jeff Karl Kowalski and Cynthia Kristan-Graham, Washington, D.C. 2007, 85-128; for an art historical perspective: George A. Kubler, "Chichén-Itzá y Tula", in: *Estudios de Cultura Maya* 1 (1961), 47-80, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.19130/iifl.ecm.1961.1.197>. After the collapse of the Maya civilisation in the central lowlands around 900 AD and the resulting migrations, a specific aesthetic in architecture and sculpture emerged on the Yucatán peninsula, which today is referred to as Maya-Toltec. This post-classical aesthetic was characterised primarily by an increased influence from more northern parts of Mesoamerica, with a rigid rectangularity, formal rigour, and monumental representative structures. Specifically, the Maya-Toltec architecture featured porticos with sculpted pillars, temples with large interiors supported by columns and built on step pyramids, *tzompantli* (skull racks), large ball courts, and representations of warriors dressed in the skins of eagles and jaguars, with Toltec weapons (spear, shield).



2 Exterior view of the Mexican Pavilion at the Ibero-American Exposition, Seville 1929. Illustration from: Manuel Amábilis Domínguez, *El Pabellón de México en la Exposición Iberoamericana de Sevilla*, Mexico City 1929, plate 6

[4] The two-storied structure housed eight exhibition halls. The entire façade, surrounding fences and a fountain were covered with architectural decoration in the neo-Maya-Toltec style. Although Amábilis characterises his architecture as being based on the model of the monumental, rectilinear Maya architecture of the Yucatán peninsula with its rectangular floor plans, he nonetheless describes it as being purely Toltec.⁴ He cites the *Palacio de Sayil* as a reference for the finely detailed interlocking columns in the façade, and there are also formal correspondences with the Maya site of Labná. Next to the main entrance, feathered serpents served as columns (Fig. 3); in the pre-colonial Mexican cultures these are an important symbol within the Mesoamerican pantheon. For example, stone sculptures of the feathered serpent goddess Quetzalcoatl can be seen at Chichén Itzá. Moreover, there are two *chacmool* figures on the pediment, as is also the case in Chichén Itzá.

⁴ "[L]a Arquitectura del exterior de nuestro Pabellón está de completo acuerdo con los trazados regulares arquitectónicos, que durante mis estudios he podido descubrir en los antiguos monumentos de Yucatán y de las márgenes del río Usumacinta, donde estuvieron los principales asientos de una muy avanzada y extensa civilización [...] la Arquitectura que luce el Pabellón de México en Sevilla es genuinamente Tolteca." Manuel Amábilis Domínguez, *El Pabellón de México en la Exposición Iberoamericana de Sevilla*, Mexico City 1929, 26.



3 Mexican Pavilion, detail of the main entrance with feathered serpents, Ibero-American Exposition, Seville 1929. Photograph from: Amábilis Domínguez (1929), plate 23

[5] The relief decorating the stepped gable above the main entrance (Fig. 2) shows five figures that were meant to symbolise the solidarity of the Mexican social classes, thus inscribing themselves in the rhetoric of the Mexican Revolution (ca. 1910–1920).⁵ This relief broke with the pre-Hispanic style that otherwise served as a model and was 'modern' in its design. These aesthetic fusions and superimpositions suggest a unity between then and now, between the pre-colonial past imagined as socialist and the post-Hispanic, post-colonial revolutionary present. In the wake of the Mexican Revolution, the disciplines of archaeology, anthropology and ethnology had achieved national prominence, and their knowledge was widely disseminated throughout society. Maya cultures were therefore ideally suited to the construction of 'national-anthropological constants' of class solidarity and the socialist vision of communal harmony. The tribes subsumed under the term Maya culture were considered to be a genuinely peace-loving people, in contrast to the Aztecs and the other cultures of the Mexican Plateau, who were seen as

⁵ Luis Carranza describes the Mexican pavilion as the architectural expression of an idea, namely a "historically derived socialism, based on pre-Hispanic traditions that advocated class equality". Luis E. Carranza, *Architecture as Revolution. Episodes in the History of Modern Mexico*, Austin 2010, 87. This is in line with the vision of the Peruvian intellectual José Mariátegui, who in his 1928 essay "El Indigenismo" identified ancient American indigenous cultures (in his argumentation the ancient Peruvian Inca culture) not only as possessing a similar proto-socialist impetus, but also – in the context of a contemporary rediscovery and political implementation of their ideas – attributed a major role to the arts; see, José Carlos Mariátegui, "XVII: Las corrientes de hoy: El Indigenismo", in: *Siete ensayos de interpretación de la realidad peruana*, Caracas 2007 [Lima 1928], 276-290.

having a militarised social structure and a warlike assertiveness.⁶ In the course of the 1930s and 1940s, the latter became the bearers of '*mexicanidad*', and their architectures became increasingly prominent during the 'institutionalisation of the revolution' and were intertwined with nationalist semantics.

[6] The Ibero-American Exposition in Seville (9 May 1929 to 21 June 1930) was conceived in conjunction with the world's fair taking place in Barcelona at the same time (20 May 1929 to 15 January 1930), and they were promoted together as the "Exposición General de España" (General Exposition of Spain). The "Exposición Internacional de Barcelona" fully celebrated industrial, aesthetic and architectural modernity.⁷ Mies van der Rohe and Lilly Reich, for example, designed the German Pavilion, a modernist structure devoid of national symbols and markings. Integrated furniture, such as the now iconic Barcelona Chair, was created specifically for the occasion to form an organic whole, conceiving of the *immeuble* and *meuble* as a single entity. In addition, the construction of new infrastructures, such as the rack railway to the Paseo Central, the metro and the streetcar stations, opened up the city to exhibition visitors and allowed them to explore it by ultra-modern means.⁸ While the focus in Barcelona was on modernity, the 'traditional' or 'folkloristic' counterpart took place in Seville. In Barcelona, fourteen industrialised European nations took part, positioning themselves as the most technologically and industrially advanced of the modern countries, with Japan and the United States represented exclusively by private companies. Spain, on the other hand, invited mainly its former colonial territories to Seville, to gather in a kind of homage to the 'motherland', which was highlighted as the center of a neo-colonial network of harmonious relations.⁹

⁶ The later founding director of the *Instituto Indigenista Interamericano*, active also for the Mexican Ministry of Education and Culture, Manuel Gamio (1883–1960), who had studied with Franz Boas, wrote a two-volume work on the culture of Teotihuacán, published in 1922 in the immediate aftermath of the revolution, which was widely read: Manuel Gamio, *La población del valle de Teotihuacán*, Mexico City 1922. In this book he claimed that the inhabitants of the metropolitan region were belligerent and organised into strict hierarchies. The image of the 'peace-loving' Maya and the 'cruel' Aztecs has only recently been corrected in scholarship, for example by David Webster, "The Not So Peaceful Civilization: A Review of Maya War", in: *Journal of World Prehistory* 14 (2000), 65-119, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1023%2FA%3A1007813518630>; Kazuo Aoyama, "Classic Maya Warfare and Weapons: Spear, Dart, and Arrow Points of Aguateca and Copan", in: *Ancient Mesoamerica* 16 (2005), 291-304, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0956536105050248>.

⁷ As early as 1928, Wolfgang Weber published his iconic photo book with the name of the city as the title, highlighting Barcelona's cosmopolitan modernity. His photographs of the construction site for the world's fair are exemplary in this respect. See Miriam Oesterreich and Anna Bessler, "Aspekte der Moderne in Wolfgang Webers *Barcelona*", in: *España a través de la cámara – Das Spanienbild im Fotobuch*, ed. Margit Kern, Leipzig 2008, 35-41.

⁸ For the Barcelona world exposition in general, see John E. Findling, "Barcelona 1929–1930", in: *Encyclopedia of World's Fairs and Expositions*, ed. John E. Findling, Jefferson 2008, 251-253; for the construction of Barcelona as a modern city, see Oliver Hochadel and Agustí Nieto-Galan, eds., *Barcelona – An Urban History of Science and Modernity, 1888–1929*, London/New York 2016, especially the chapter by Jordi Ferran and Agustí Nieto-Galan, "The City of Electric Light: Experts and Users at the 1929 International Exhibition and Beyond", in: Hochadel and Nieto-Galan, eds. (2016), 223-244.

[7] By this time, Mexico had been politically independent from Spain for more than a century, since 1821. In 1920, the tenth year since its inception, the Mexican Revolution finally ended with victory over the conservative *Porfiriato* (from 1876 to 1911, Mexico had been under the dictatorial rule of General Porfirio Díaz). This was followed by a period of cultural-political upheaval that turned against the aesthetics of European influence and led to a nationalist reappraisal of Mexican indigenous and pre-colonial cultural elements, which reached its peak at the end of the 1920s. As Martha Fernández has noted, the Mexican government accepted the invitation to Seville largely because international exhibitions of this kind were much like a showcase that offered the opportunity to present Mexico's very own 'progress' and 'modernity' to the world, and thus to claim a position among the modern states.¹⁰ The post-revolutionary government of Plutarco Elías saw Seville as an opportunity "to change the image of Mexico as a violent and chaotic country [...]. Most of all, the fair was an occasion to exploit curiosity about, and to foster favorable international opinion of, the Mexican Revolution."¹¹ For the architect Amábilis, the indigenist architectural aesthetic offered a chance to combine the image of the pacifist Maya with that of post-revolutionary Mexico, and to express artistically the autonomy and modernity of his nation; or, as he put it in the publication on the Seville pavilion: "to achieve and recognize this communion of a native race, the love for an autonomous country".¹²

[8] If the indigenist design of the façade and the context of the building – in a discourse that affirmatively reappraised indigenous elements for aesthetics and culture – were able to make this position plausible, the interior of the pavilion is all the more surprising for paying homage so forthrightly and openly to the 'mother country' of Spain. A frieze in the entrance hall featured a poetic dedication (Fig. 4):

*Mother Spain: because you have illuminated American lands with the brilliance of your culture, and placed the devotional light of your spirit in my soul, now both in my land and soul those lights have blossomed. Mexico*¹³

⁹ Cf. Tenorio-Trillo (1996), 220. The metaphor of the colonial 'mother country' and its daughters, the colonised territories (who came of age after independence but were still in the familial network), was a widespread gendered allegorisation of colonial politics. This gendering of colonial political relations was particularly evident in the characterisation of Spain as *Madre Patria* and the allegory of *Hispania* that was prominent in the Ibero-American exhibition; see Anthony Gristwood, "Commemorating Empire in Twentieth-Century Seville", in: *Imperial Cities. Landscape, Display, and Identity*, eds. Felix Driver and David Gilbert, Manchester 1999, 155-173, especially 158-160.

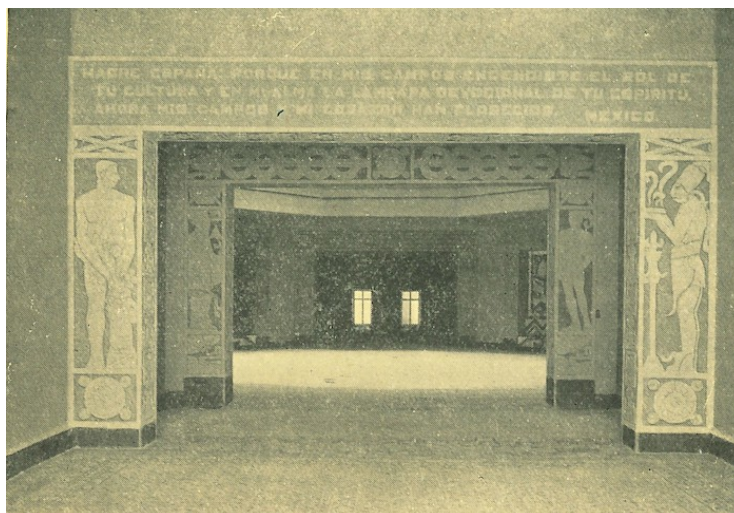
¹⁰ See Fernández (2006).

¹¹ Tenorio-Trillo (1996), 224.

¹² Amábilis (1929), 23-24.

¹³ Spanish original: "Madre España: Porque en mis campos encendiste el sol de tu cultura y en mi alma la lámpara devocional de tu espíritu ahora mis campos y mi alma han florecido. Méjico"; translation into English from Tenorio-Trillo (1996), 222.

The same dedication was printed on contemporary souvenir postcards and served as the motto for Amábilis Domínguez's book publication on *El Pabellón de México en la Exposición Iberoamericana de Sevilla, Mexico City 1929* – it was by no means a hidden or subtly encoded message.



4 Mexican Pavilion, entrance hall with inscriptional frieze, Ibero-American Exposition, Seville 1929. Photograph from: Amábilis Domínguez (1929), plate 25

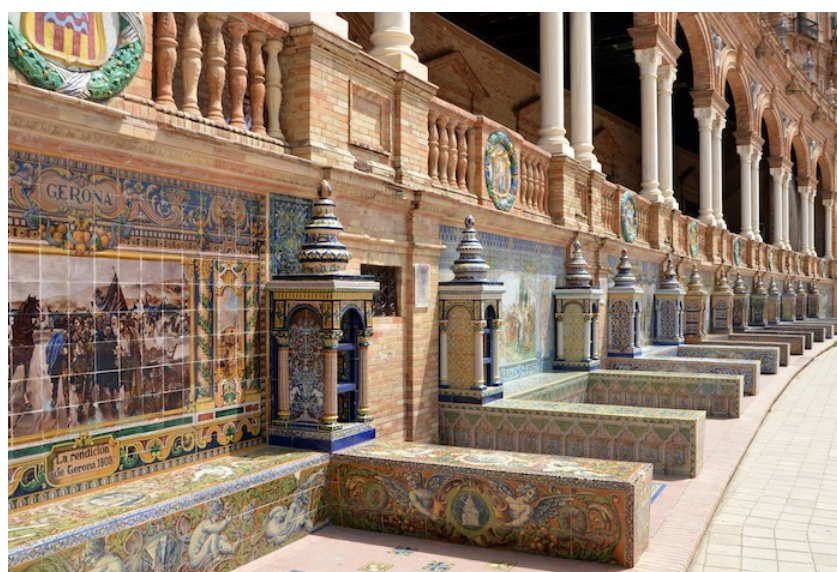
[9] Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo has remarked on the occasion and concept of the exhibition that "the aim of Seville's exhibit was not to portray the entire modern world but to modernize the idea of Hispanism [...]".¹⁴ On the one hand, Spain's cultural imperialist self-image towards the Latin American nations, which had been decolonised for more than a century, is clearly expressed by the location: It was from Seville that Columbus embarked on his voyage to America, and it was here that he returned with his fleet. For centuries, Seville was a major hub for the trade in colonial goods and the center of global migratory movements within colonialism, including the trade in enslaved people. The exhibition design shows how Spain sought to present itself on a monumental scale through the *Plaza de España*.¹⁵ Measuring 200 meters in diameter, the semicircular plaza metaphorically 'embraces' the former colonies, but also the architecturally co-opted regions of the country, which are arranged alphabetically in 48 tile ornaments featuring maps of the provinces, mosaics of historical events, and the coats of arms of the provincial capitals (Figs. 5-6).

¹⁴ Tenorio-Trillo (1996), 221.

¹⁵ On the exhibition's architectural setting, which both represents and codifies colonial hierarchies, see Carranza (2010), 87-89.



5 *Plaza de España in Seville*, photograph by Walter Mittelholzer, 1932, 2,4 × 3,6 cm. ETH-Bibliothek Zürich, Bildarchiv/Stiftung Luftbild Schweiz, [LBS_MH02-13-0568](#) (Public Domain Mark)



6 *Plaza de España, Seville*, detail of the tile ornamentation, 1929 (photo: [Wikipedia Commons](#)).

[10] Moreover, the form of the *Plaza de España* evokes aesthetic parallels with bullfighting arenas, an architecture that had become closely linked to Spanish national identity in the course of the nineteenth century, and which, along with flamenco, was positioned as a national symbol. It is no coincidence, then, that this recourse to national Spain as the 'mother country' takes place in Andalusia, since the southern region has taken on a national character through the reappraisal

– via ideas and imagination – of such romanticised aspects of Andalusian folklore. What was perceived as typically Spanish corresponds above all to the clichés associated with Andalusia.¹⁶

[11] The *azulejo* tiles of the *Plaza de España*, a hybrid export hit of the Spanish colonial power,¹⁷ and the ornamentation of the architectural decoration evoke reminiscences of the Moorish rule over Spain, which is ultimately domesticated in the ornament.¹⁸ The metaphor of the 'mother country' is also used in the exhibition brochure:

*Seville, center of centuries of Spanish culture, has invited Portugal and the countries of North and South America, which owe their birth to the intrepid spirit of Spain's early maritime adventurers, to come and congratulate with the Mother of Nations the progress made in their history, their art, and their cultural advancement.*¹⁹

[12] As Tenorio-Trillo explains, with the eclectic amalgam of the most diverse styles, both interior and exterior, Mexico was able to mythicise the ideas of the Revolution, idealising them for public consumption in a romantic tenor, while at the same time making use of a conservative Hispanism. The revolutionary myth created in the course of the 1920s could then be employed to gain access to the modern, cosmopolitan world.²⁰ Amábilis considered this amalgamation of different styles and the simultaneous singularisation of native elements – with which he was part of a much larger current in the cultural politics of post-revolutionary Mexico – as the elaboration of a national Mexican architectural style.²¹ And the international exhibitions or world's fairs were the perfect formats to render visible this aspiration and to establish its broad popularity.

¹⁶ See Miriam Oesterreich, "Das 'andere' Europa – Die Konstruktion nationaler Identität im 19. Jahrhundert und der orientalisierte Körper der 'Spanierin'", in: *Miradas – Zeitschrift für Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte der Américas und der Iberischen Halbinsel* 4 (2020), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.11588/mira.2018.0.76068>. On folklore and the folkloric as genuinely modern 'inventions' of the nineteenth century, see Regina Bendix and Galit Hasan-Rokem, eds., *A Companion to Folklore*, Chichester 2012; Regina Bendix, *In Search of Authenticity: The Formation of Folklore Studies*, Madison 1997; Martha Sims and Martine Stephens, *Living Folklore: Introduction to the Study of People and their Traditions*, Logan 2005; Pertti Anttonen, *Tradition through Modernity. Postmodernism and the Nation-State in Folklore Scholarship*, Helsinki 2005.

¹⁷ See Élisabeth de Balanda, ed., *Les métamorphoses de l'azur. L'art de l'azulejo dans le monde latin*, Paris 2002; Jan Pluis and Min Chen, *Dutch Tiles of the 20th Century with Images of the Far East*, Leiden 2020; Karina H. Corrigan, Jan van Campen, and Femke Diercks, eds., *Asia in Amsterdam. The Culture of Luxury in the Golden Age*, exh. cat., New Haven, CT 2015.

¹⁸ For the domesticating function of the ornament, see Jörg H. Gleiter, *Rückkehr des Verdrängten. Zur kritischen Theorie des Ornaments in der architektonischen Moderne*, Weimar 2002.

¹⁹ *Seville: Spanish American Exposition 1929–1930*, pamphlet, official publication of the Spanish government; quoted according to Carranza (2010), 89.

²⁰ Cf. Tenorio-Trillo (1996), 233.

²¹ Cf. Tenorio-Trillo (1996), 236. See also Xavier Moyssen, "El nacionalismo y la arquitectura", in: *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* 55 (1986), 111-131, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22201/iiie.18703062e.1986.55.1275>.

Paris 1889

[13] Amábilis's way of adopting pre-colonial aesthetic elements from the ruins of ancient American cultures, varying them and then combining them into a new amalgam is a form of architectural indigenism. However, it must be remembered that the adaptation of pre-colonial and indigenous forms is by no means an innovation of post-revolutionary architecture serving the interests of the state – rather, there is a longer tradition of such adaptation since the late nineteenth century.²² Mexico itself, under the rule of Porfirio Díaz, had an indigenist pavilion built for the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1889, known as the *Palacio Azteca*, the Aztec Palace, which became somewhat famous at the time (Fig. 7).



7 The Aztec Palace at the 1889 Paris world's fair, photographer: Hippolyte Blancard, 1889, platinum print from a silver gelatin-bromide glass negative, ca. 16 × 22.5 cm. Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Estampes et photographies, boîte fol. A-EO-508 (12) (photo: BnF Gallica, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b11600595d>).

[14] The *Porfiriato* was initially a period of relative stability. Díaz pursued a policy of industrialisation and modernisation, driven by large-scale infrastructure and engineering projects such as the extension of the railway network, the construction of bridges and the promotion of specific industries such as mining and textiles.²³ Participation in world's fairs – Paris in 1867,²⁴ Philadelphia in 1876, New Orleans in 1884, and finally Paris in 1889 and again in 1900 – was

²² María Fernández states: "The Mexican state strategically employed pre-Hispanic revival architecture in order to construct an image of national identity that differentiated Mexico from Europe and the United States." María Fernández, *Cosmopolitanism in Mexican Visual Culture*, Austin 2014, 133.

²³ For the role of railway construction in Mexican pictorial media of the late nineteenth century, see Maricela Dorantes Soria, "El ferrocarril como emblema de progreso: el Puente de Metlac. The Railroad as Emblem of Progress: The Metlac Bridge", in: *Bitácora Arquitectura* no. 34 (2017), 32-41, DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22201/fa.14058901p.2016.34.58087>.

intended to present Mexico as a modern nation and to establish an international presence, both of which would counteract the common stereotypes of the country as uncivilized, barbaric and backward; in effect, it was the performance of a balancing act between metropolis and periphery. Immigrants were to be recruited and investors attracted, while also tourism was increasingly promoted, a strategy that gained considerable importance in the first half of the twentieth century.

[15] The indigenist *Palacio Azteca*, designed by architects Antonio Peñafiel and Antonio de Anza for the "Exposition universelle de Paris de 1889", measured 70 m × 30 m and imitated a *teocalli*, a stepped Aztec temple pyramid. According to the call for tenders, the structure was to "characterise the architecture of the most civilised races of Mexico, but to distance itself from the dimensions of the ancient monuments, which [particularly] contradict modern needs and taste".²⁵ The desire to be authentic and specifically Mexican was thus combined with the aspiration to be modern.²⁶ Although the structure purported to authentically reproduce the Aztec architectural culture and provide a tangible experience of it, it is in fact a collage, both stylistically and technically: classical elements are used in an eclectic manner, the sculptures represent pre-colonial heroes but stylistically follow the sculptural heroism of the French *fin-de-siècle*, while the steel girders and modern materials facilitated its construction and dismantling. In the trilingual brochure on the Mexican pavilion, which was massively distributed at the exhibition, Peñafiel declared his palace to be "constructed in the purest Aztec style", drawing comparisons between the Aztec past and Greco-Roman antiquity.²⁷ The interior, however, was dominated by a typically French, or in this case 'modern' design, with a spacious staircase, metal construction, glass display cases, a glass ceiling, and various theatrical devices used in contemporary exhibition practice, such as an array of curtains and drapes.

[16] This heroisation of the Aztec past in the *Palacio Azteca* went hand in hand with a simultaneous radical denigration of the contemporary indigenous people and their cultures: the Díaz dictatorship had privatised enormous tracts of land, leaving around 90% of the rural population without any property, and most of them ended up in debt bondage or even slavery,

²⁴ As early as 1867, under Maximilian I, Emperor of the Second Mexican Empire, the French archaeologist and photographer Désiré Charnay ordered the design of an indigenist building for the "Exposition universelle d'Art et d'industrie" in Paris. Regarding "la construcción del pabellón, el cual resultó una extrañísima réplica, 'a escala natural, del Templo de Quetzalcoatl de Xochicalco!'", see Moysen (1986), 113-114.

²⁵ Tenorio-Trillo (1996), 65, my translation.

²⁶ Cf. Tenorio-Trillo (1996), 65.

²⁷ On Peñafiel's (educational and epistemological) concept for the Aztec Palace, see Sven Schuster, "The World's Fairs as Spaces of Global Knowledge: Latin American Archaeology and Anthropology in the Age of Exhibitions", in: *Journal of Global History* 13 (2018), no. 1, 69-93: 81-87.

forced to live in extremely precarious conditions.²⁸ The idealisation of the Aztecs only worked because they were considered a "past past"²⁹, a people from a long gone era.

[17] Tenorio-Trillo argues that the deciding factor in the design of the *Palacio Azteca* was an argument advanced by the *Porfiriato* elite: to satisfy a European cosmopolitan demand for the exotic,³⁰ or in other words, to auto-exoticise one's own culture on the stage of the world's fair, offering it as a consumable in a setting governed by supply and demand, import and export, not only of goods and commodities, but also of cultural images. It is precisely the world's fairs that seem to have been locations where the exhibition, definition, and promotion of the 'indigenous' functioned efficiently and profitably, found a large and interested public, and were relatively easy to stage.

[18] Postcolonial nations such as those of Latin America played an ambivalent role in the relationship between colonising and colonised nations: on the one hand, no longer colonies since around 1821, they strove to present themselves as modern nations; however, on the other hand, they often adopted the role of the 'exotic Other' in their representation and exhibited their own folklore.³¹ Views of the display cases in the *Palacio Azteca* show that mainly traditional objects, handicrafts, and ethnographic artefacts such as ceramics were exhibited. In its eclectic fusion of diverse elements from all over Mexico, the *Palacio Azteca* reveals a strategic use of forms of self-exoticisation that served a dual purpose: to be perceived as specifically Mexican and, at the same time, as specifically modern, thus combining the apparent opposites of historical lines of tradition and modern cosmopolitanism.³²

[19] In this context, I agree with Alejandra Uslenghi who also makes a compelling argument for interpreting the building as a conscious reclamation of national modernity. She describes how the deliberate incorporation of 'modern' materials like glass and iron served to aesthetically

²⁸ Cf. Beat Wyss, *Bilder von der Globalisierung. Die Weltausstellung von Paris 1889*, Berlin 2010, 125; see also Stacie G. Widdifield, *The Embodiment of the National in Late Nineteenth-Century Mexican Painting*, Tucson 1996, 10: "It asserts, within the context of art, the construction of a simulacrum of the Indian, of the aura of an elite culture from which the present of the nineteenth century could claim a legitimizing descent. [...] The underside of this assertion of elite pre-Hispanic culture, however, is set against the ravaged and deprived culture of contemporary Indians, a predicament articulated over and over in the nineteenth century."

²⁹ Tenorio-Trillo (1996), 121.

³⁰ Cf. Tenorio-Trillo (1996), 236.

³¹ For the exhibition of archaeological and anthropological artefacts, see Schuster (2018). Later, exhibiting folklore increasingly served to attract tourists; see Miriam Oesterreich, "Displaying the 'Mexican' – National Identity and Transnational Entanglements at the New York World's Fair (1939/40)", in: *World Fairs and International Exhibitions: National Self-Profiling in an Internationalist Context, 1851–1940*, eds. Joep Leerssen and Eric Storm, Leiden 2021, 265–299.

³² See also Shelley E. Garrigan, "Collections, Nation and Melancholy at the World's Fair: Re-reading Mexico in Paris 1889", in: *La Habana Elegante. Revista de literatura y cultura cubana, caribeña, latinoamericana y de estética* no. 46 (Fall/Winter 2009), dossier *Posesión y desposesión: perspectivas sobre el coleccionismo*, ed. María Mercedes Andrade, http://www.habanaelegante.com/Fall_Winter_2009/Dossier_Garrigan.html.

transform the specific Aztec heritage into a national emblem, thereby symbolically aligning it with the European civilisations of Greek and Roman antiquity. This reinterpretation of history is notably intertwined with the architectural historicism seen in Western and Central Europe during the era of industrialised modernity. Uslenghi argues:

It was precisely the construction of an Aztec temple replica, reproduced with modern technical means, what constituted it as an image of the past; the legacy of antiquity comprised the materials from which the new whole was to be built. Its technological reproduction named the ruin as a site of reevaluation of tradition [...]. In keeping with the Mexican exhibit's argument for a culture that encompassed its own destruction in order to instrumentalize the remains at the service of the national epic, the modern structure of the Aztec temple was posed as a way to dominate history continuously from the vantage point of the present, rather than arrest it in the past.³³

Folklore and cosmopolitanism

[20] At the 1929 Ibero-American Exposition in Seville, women dressed in folk costumes made some kind of appearance in the pavilion. They were presented as modern variants of an indigeneity that could be identified as belonging to the pre-colonial era (Fig. 8).³⁴ With the positive reevaluation of regionalism, the virtues of the Mexican Revolution and nationalism seem to be aptly embodied in the image of a woman, and an indigenous woman at that, especially the *Tehuana*.³⁵ The Mexican nation, in the form of an attractive, smiling young woman, could possibly mitigate the violence of the revolution and create harmony after the affront of independence, in short, have a healing effect.

³³ Uslenghi (2016), 131; see also 131-132: "In its use of antiquity as a claim to outmost modernity, the pavilion image demonstrates how allegorical mechanics reveal the profound gap between materiality and meaning, the estrangement between the myth of culture as a language of universality and social generalization, and the object of culture in the unstable artifice of its own signification."

³⁴ See the contemporary film showing indigenously dressed women at the entrance to the Mexican pavilion, a striking contrast to the 'modern' and extravagantly dressed visitors: "Pabellón de Méjico Exposición Iberoamericana de Sevilla", uploaded by Juan José Cabrero Nieves, camera unknown, original title unknown, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZP8iCIHUwSc> (accessed September 25, 2023).

³⁵ See also Miriam Oesterreich, "'Ethno-Fashion' in Modernist Mexico –Transfer Processes between Anachronistic Recourse, Individual Identity and the Transnational Conception of Modernism", in: *Design Dispersed. Forms of Migration and Flight*, eds. Burcu Dogramaci and Kerstin Pinther, Bielefeld 2019, 190-210.



8 Women in indigenous-inspired costumes – a *Tehuana* everyday costume and a *Tehuana* holiday costume – in the Mexican Pavilion during the Ibero-American Exposition, Seville 1929, filmstill from: *Sevilla, Andalucía*, film commissioned by the Patronato Nacional de Turismo, 1929, online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOIDIR1y4Z8>, time: 00:17:50 (September 27, 2023)

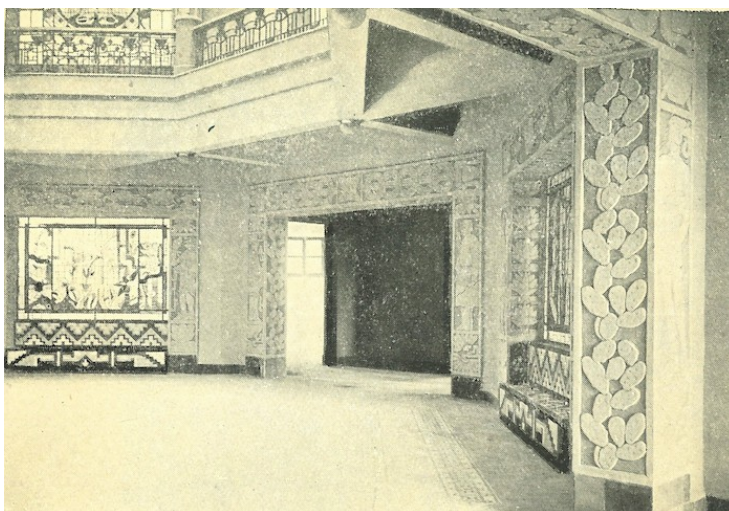
[21] While the adoptions of the Mesoamerican canon of forms are obvious in the 1929 pavilion, I think the ruptures in these adoptions are equally apparent (Fig. 2). Even at first glance, the pavilion in Seville, with its strange cruciform floor plan more reminiscent of panopticon prisons than an exhibition building, looks very different from ninth- to eleventh-century Mayan structures. Rather than Mesoamerican ceremonial architecture, the baroque forms of the pediment seem to recall the Mission Revival style popular in the United States at the time.³⁶ The Mexican coat of arms, with the eagle perched on a cactus and a snake trapped in its talon and mouth, breaks with Mayan aesthetics in the intersecting axis of the façade, while its encasement in plaster is more reminiscent of another Baroque influence, the mandorla enclosing the venerated image of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico's national saint, than of ancient Mexican imagery. Similarly, the sectional view of the building (Fig. 9) with its ribbed vaulting strongly reminiscent of sacred architecture and the light flooding in from above through a stained glass window featuring the national coat of arms, much like the effect of a Baroque cupola lantern, highlights the blatant differences with classical Maya architecture.

³⁶ For the Mission Revival Style, see Karen J. Weitze, *California's Mission Revival*, Los Angeles 1984; Paul A. Royka, *Mission Furniture – Furniture of the American Arts and Crafts Movement*, Atglen, PA 1997.



9 Mexican Pavilion for the Ibero-American Exposition, Seville 1929, sectional view. Illustration from: Amábilis Domínguez (1929), plate 5

[22] The eclecticism is even more pronounced in the interior: the murals and the furnishings, the ornamentation and the inscriptions are fully indebted to Art Déco (Fig. 10).



10 Mexican Pavilion, interior view of the ground floor, Ibero-American Exposition, Seville 1929. Photograph from: Amábilis Domínguez (1929), plate 30

In 1925, with the "Exposition International des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes" in Paris, the Art Déco style, previously developed and popular in France, established itself as the fashionable style of the period and rapidly turned into an international phenomenon.³⁷ As a result, the second half of the decade saw its widespread acceptance and adoption in the United States, with architects in particular embracing the style enthusiastically for the new skyscrapers. Diego Rivera, noting their blocky and tapered massive forms, described this high-rise architecture

³⁷ See Irena R. Makaryk, *April in Paris. Theatricality, Modernism, and Politics at the 1925 Art Deco Expo*, Toronto/Buffalo/London 2018.

as a descendant of and directly influenced by Mexican stepped pyramid architecture.³⁸ The Briton Alfred Charles Bossom, who had worked as an architect in the USA, wrote:

*In the skyscraper America has invented and developed a wholly new and revolutionary form and type of building that is absolutely and characteristically her own. Search for foreign inspiration or example and you will search in vain. The skyscraper is as indigenous as the Red Indian.*³⁹

However, as Oriana Baddeley has noted, formal associations are evoked rather than the forms themselves duplicated or copied:⁴⁰

*[...] the introduction of ancient Mexico to the conceptual framework of western designers stems from a wider aspiration, to escape from the constraints of the classical European tradition and to contravene the accepted rules of proportion and articulation. Ancient Greece and Rome were replaced by their perceived opposites, ancient cultures outside of the European norms. In this context, the accuracy of historical or geographic quotation was not important since the priority was to achieve a novel, exotic effect.*⁴¹

[23] Art Déco was also widely adopted in Mexico – and more broadly, throughout Latin America. In Mexico, for example, the magazine *Cemento* was responsible for the widespread and enthusiastic reception of Art Déco (Fig. 11).⁴² Modernist in both form and content, *Cemento* was the bulletin of the Committee to Promote the Use of Portland Cement, and indeed new materials such as reinforced concrete and stainless steel were favoured in Art Déco architecture.

³⁸ This is pointed out by an article in the *New York Herald Tribune*, November 14, 1931, quoted in Oriana Baddeley, "Ancient Mexican Sources of Art Déco", in: *Art Déco 1910–1939*, eds. Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton and Ghislaine Wood, exh. cat. Victoria & Albert Museum London, London 2003, 57-64: 57.

³⁹ Alfred Charles Bossom, *Building to the Skies – The Romance of the Skyscraper*, London/New York 1934, 9.

⁴⁰ Cf. Baddeley (2003), 57.

⁴¹ Baddeley (2003), 58.

⁴² Cf. Cardoso (2003), 401. On the journal *Cemento* and its role within architectural modernism in Mexico, see: Georg Leidenberger, "Tres revistas mexicanas de arquitectura: Portavoces de la modernidad, 1923–1950", in: *Anales del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas* [online] 34 (2012), no. 101, 109-138, http://www.scielo.org.mx/scielo.php?script=sci_arttext&pid=S0185-12762012000200005&lng=es&nrm=iso (accessed September 25, 2023).



11 Cover of *Cemento* no. 24 (July 1928), bulletin of the *Comité para Propagar el Uso del Cemento Portland*. Hemeroteca Nacional de México, UNAM, Mexico City

[24] With regard to Latin America, Rafael Cardoso describes the 1920s as an epoch in which the political polarisation between nationalism and internationalism, between regionalism and cosmopolitanism had not yet been fully played out, and in which many (younger) Latin American intellectuals did not see it as a contradiction to embrace a self-understanding that was at once modern and national.⁴³ He characterises Art Déco as a style that was ideally suited to express modernity and at the same time be utilised for national interests.

[25] Baddeley sees the adoption of Art Déco, international in its scope and breathtaking in its pace, as a direct consequence of the 'culture of the world fairs', initiated and internationalised by the aforementioned Paris Exposition, which she identifies as "Art Déco's birth amid the assertive nationalism of the World Fairs".⁴⁴ She sees many of the elements of the canon of ancient American forms that inspired the proponents of Art Déco in the 1920s as having been pioneered precisely by Antonio Peñafiel's Aztec Palace at the Paris Universal Exhibition of 1889, and by the neo-Maya representation of ancient Mexican structures in plaster casts at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago.⁴⁵

⁴³ Rafael Cardoso, "Ambiguously Modern: Art Déco in Latin America", in: *Art Déco 1910–1939*, eds. Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton and Ghislaine Wood, exh. cat. Victoria & Albert Museum London, London 2003, 396-405: 398. For a broader discussion of the relations between design and national style, see Jeremy Aynsley, *Nationalism and Internationalism. Design in the 20th Century*, London 1995, esp. 31-42.

⁴⁴ Baddeley (2003), 58-59.

⁴⁵ See Baddeley (2003), 58-59.

[26] The latter exhibition was a landmark moment, for it was the first time that "Mayan culture and architecture" was brought "to North American public attention [...] – with stimulating results for further research and patronage".⁴⁶ A key figure here was Frederic Ward Putnam, ethnologist and anthropologist at Harvard University and curator of the university's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology. Taking a historical perspective, Putnam was interested in profiling the advanced indigenous civilisations flourishing at the time of the discovery of the 'New World', particularly the culture of the Yucatán Maya.⁴⁷ In turn, in response to the World's Columbian Exposition, Prairie Style architecture emerged with figures such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin. Wright and his assistant Louis Sullivan shared a disparaging view of the neoclassical style, which was based on the European tradition, and emphasised what they considered to be the innovative and genuinely American aspects of ancient American architecture.⁴⁸ The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition was considered as particularly decisive for the spread of the official Beaux-Arts style, which predominated in the mostly large pavilions in the so-called White City.⁴⁹ However, later Prairie Style architects found inspiration for their innovative designs in the study of the life-size plaster cast imitations of ancient Mexican structures, most notably the Nunnery Quadrangle of Uxmal (c. 900–1000 AD) and the Gateway Arch of Labná (c. 700–900 AD), that were displayed at 65th Street and Lake Michigan, the highest point on the fairgrounds, a short walk from the Anthropology Building. There, they were undoubtedly seen by most visitors, including Frank Lloyd Wright, who visited the exhibition on several occasions.⁵⁰ This architect would play an important role in adapting pre-colonial architectural forms to create a specifically American modernist architecture based on horizontality, flat roofs with overhanging eaves, and open interiors, and which sought to create a special affinity between architectural form and the landscape-oriented aesthetic of the vast American West.

⁴⁶ Curtis M. Hinsley, "Anthropology as Education and Entertainment: Frederic Ward Putnam at the World's Fair", in: *Coming of Age in Chicago. The 1893 World's Fair and the Coalescence of American Anthropology*, eds. Curtis M. Hinsley and David R. Wilcox, Lincoln/London 2016, 1-77: 47.

⁴⁷ See Helen Delpar, "Casting an Image of Modernity: Yucatán at the World's Columbian Exposition 1893", in: *Peripheral Visions: Politics, Society, and the Challenges of Modernity in Yucatán*, eds. Edward D. Terry et al., Tuscaloosa 2010, 38-53: 44-45.

⁴⁸ See David Hammond, "The Prairie School's Mexican Connection: How Ancient Mayan Architecture Shaped Frank Lloyd Wright", in: *New City Design Magazine* (October 1, 2017), <https://design.newcity.com/2017/10/01/impact-of-the-indigenous-on-wrights-prairie-school-how-ancient-mayan-architecture-shaped-frank-lloyd-wright/> (accessed September 25, 2023). On the Prairie School of architecture, see for example Harold Allen Brooks, *Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School*, New York 1984; Brandon K. Ruud, *Frank Lloyd Wright – Buildings for the Prairie*, Milwaukee, WI 2017.

⁴⁹ See Ira Jacknis, "Refracting Images. Anthropological Display at the Chicago World's Fair, 1893", in: *Coming of Age in Chicago. The 1893 World's Fair and the Coalescence of American Anthropology*, eds. Curtis M. Hinsley and David R. Wilcox, Lincoln/London 2016, 261-336: 276; see Delpar (2010), 38-53.

⁵⁰ See Jacknis (2016), 261-336; Delpar (2010), 47-48. Delpar explains that after its closure in October 1893, large parts of the anthropological exhibition were transferred to the newly established Chicago Field Columbian Museum, most likely including Thompson's cast reproductions.

[27] Baddeley summarises the significance of the two world's exhibitions – Paris 1889 and Chicago 1893 – for the appropriations and re-formations of ancient American forms as follows:

*These two 19th-century manifestations of the introduction of Mesoamerican motifs within the context of contemporary design exemplified a duality of approach that was to remain central to the popularization of ancient Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s. The Aztec Palace was the most expensive and largest display Mexico had ever put on at a World Fair. [...] Token gestures were made to the Aztec aesthetic but the pavilion functioned primarily as a symbol of a new, independent, modern and cosmopolitan Mexico.*⁵¹

In addition, the multifaceted Art Déco lent itself to the integration of specific indigenous elements, thus creating 'intrinsic', 'national' substyles. However, any distinction only worked in part, for 'exotic' forms always attracted attention precisely because of this 'otherness' embedded in the ornamentation.⁵² Indeed, it was the hybrid, the eclectic, often the fantastical of Mexico's indigenist self-portrayal at the world's fairs, drawing on and referencing the 'whole' spectrum of Mesoamerica and its – in fact very diverse – architectural styles, that informed the ornamental repertoire of Western, mainly North American architects and designers in the early twentieth century.⁵³

[28] Besides the influence of Mexico on the architectural language of the United States through indigenist-informed Art Déco designs, North American architects themselves travelled south, some as early as the late 1910s, seeking inspiration for their own modern architectural language in Mexico's ancient sites. These ventures were very much in keeping with the spirit of the times: in its search for the 'New', Primitivism invariably drew attention to the particularly modernist aspects discernible in the 'Other'.

[29] The Mayan Revival style drew on ancient Mexican forms and inserted them into contemporary settings, in the United States with modern materials, formal variations, and luxurious features.⁵⁴ Significantly, the long list of indigenist structures in the United States, i.e.

⁵¹ Baddeley (2003), 58-59.

⁵² Cf. Cardoso (2003), 401.

⁵³ Cf. Baddeley (2003), 59.

⁵⁴ Although the Mayan Revival style was adapted primarily in the United States and used to represent Mexico abroad, there were isolated cases of a pre-Hispanic revival in Mexico itself as early as the nineteenth century for buildings of national importance, such as the *Monumento a Cuauhtémoc* (1878–1887) in Mexico City; see María Fernández, "Architecture: 19th Century", in: *Concise Encyclopedia of Mexico*, ed. Michael S. Werner, Chicago/London 2001, 19-31. At the beginning of the twentieth century, in the *Palacio de Bellas Artes* building in Mexico City (built 1904–1934), feathered serpents and eagle warriors based on Aztec prototypes were included into the sculptural programme, similar to the stage curtain designed by Dr Atl, which depicts the volcanoes Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl: "The government's approval of [Italian architect Adamo] Boari's design indicates an interest on the part of the Porfirian administration to claim a place for Mexican culture next to the cultural heritage of Europe. Similar attitudes clearly were expressed by contemporary architects such as Luis Salazar, Nicolás Mariscal, and Jesús Acevedo, who searched for solutions to create a modern architecture with a national character. While Salazar advocated a

those that reveal a direct reference to pre-colonial forms, begins with the Pan-American Union Building in Washington, completed in 1910, which featured Mesoamerican design elements such as ornamental bas-reliefs and decorative rosettes with 'Mayan hieroglyphs', i.e. Latin letters in a typography similar to Mayan characters, as well as a fountain conceived as representative of the advanced civilisations of Mesoamerica. Marjorie Ingle has identified the 1915 Panama-Pacific International Exposition in San Diego as integral to the establishment and dissemination of the Mayan Revival style: "The 1915 Exposition was to be a showcase of California and western regionalism, the development of a Southern California vernacular".⁵⁵

[30] Concurrent with the development of the Mayan Revival style, the United States initiated the idea of Pan-Americanism, the cultural dimension of the so-called Good Neighbor Policy of the 1930s. In response to the First World War in Europe, this policy entailed a non-interventionist attitude towards the national affairs of Latin American states.⁵⁶ As a direct neighbour of the United States with a long shared border, Mexico played a special role in this policy, which sought to promote cultural and economic exchange based on mutual respect. The initiation and development of (mass) tourism in the southern nations, particularly in Mexico, was an integral part of the Pan-American idea,⁵⁷ and found concrete expression in projects such as the Pan-

Mexican architecture based on ancient indigenous building traditions, Mariscal and Acevedo proposed a national architecture based on colonial buildings." (Fernández [2001], 27-28). The Yucatán region saw the construction of a number of Pre-Hispanic Revival buildings, such as the *Sanatorium Rendón Peniche* (1919) and *La Casa del Pueblo* (1928) in Mérida, many of which were built by Manuel Amábilis, his son Max, and often in collaboration with Rómulo Rozo, with whom he was later commissioned to construct the Seville Pavilion in 1929. See Fernández (2001), 32-34. Since the 1950s, the Pre-Hispanic Revival style has been favoured in the tourist centers of Acapulco and Cancún for hotels and attractions as well as cinemas, theatres, etc., see Fernández (2014), 137.

⁵⁵ Marjorie Ingle, *The Mayan Revival Style*, Salt Lake City 1984, 8. For Southern Regionalism or Southwest Modernism, see: Janet A. Stewart, *Arizona Ranch Houses: Southern Territorial Styles, 1867–1900*, Tucson 1987; Elizabeth Armstrong et al., eds., *Birth of the Cool: California Art, Design, and Culture at Midcentury*, Munich 2007; Paul J. Karlstrom, ed., *On the Edge of America: California Modernist Art, 1900–1950*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1996. Southwest Modernism also includes the modernist version of adobe building structures.

⁵⁶ Cf. Mary E. Stuckey, *The Good Neighbor – Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Rhetoric of American Power*, East Lansing 2013. On Pan-Americanism cf. also Richard Cándida Smith, *Improvised Continent. Pan-Americanism and Cultural Exchange*, Philadelphia 2017; Robert A. González, "Beyond the Midway. Pan-American Modernity in the 1930s", in: *Designing Tomorrow. America's World's Fairs of the 1930s*, eds. Robert W. Rydell and Laura Burd Schiavo, New Haven/London 2010, 57-75; Danielle Mercer et al., "Images of the 'Other'. Pan American Airways, Americanism, and the Idea of Latin America", in: *International Journal of Cross Cultural Management (CCM)* 17 (2017), no. 3, 327-343, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470595817720952>; Mark T. Gilderhus, *Pan-American Visions. Woodrow Wilson in the Western Hemisphere, 1913–1921*, London 1986.

⁵⁷ See Dina Berger, "A Drink between Friends. Mexican and American Pleasure Seekers in 1940s Mexico City", in: *Adventures into Mexico. American Tourism beyond the Border*, ed. Nicholas Dagen Blom, Lanham 2006, 13-34: 18.

American Highway, which was completed in 1936 and provided a direct connection between Laredo (Texas) and Mexico City.⁵⁸

[31] The Mayan Revival style can be regarded as part of a broader effort to establish a pan-American aesthetic that aimed to clearly distinguish itself from the previously dominant European canon of forms. That is, in the United States, ancient indigenous Mexican elements were adopted into modern architecture, interiors, and design, and were valorised in distinction to hegemonic European forms and judgments of taste, because they were seen as specifically American. Holly Barnet-Sánchez has traced and explained the ambivalence of 'intrinsic' and 'extrinsic' aesthetics in the collecting of ancient Mexican objects, and it is precisely this ambivalence that also applies to Mayan Revival architectures:

*Pan-Americanism had created a context for a specific art-culture system in the United States that permitted and even encouraged the collection [...] and presentation of Pre-Columbian objects as part of a greater hemispheric heritage, which, by definition, made these antiquities ours, that is belonging very specifically to the citizens of the United States. These objects came to embody an irreconcilable contradiction, being both the product of the 'Other' [...] and a part of the U.S. Euro-American patrimony.*⁵⁹

[32] Frank Lloyd Wright is also considered one of the main proponents of the Revival style – he integrated Mesoamerican architectural elements into eclectic, often concrete structures, such as the Hollywood villas Hollyhock and Ennis House. The source of inspiration was even more evident in the villas than in the skyscrapers, especially given the placement of Mesoamerican ceremonial structures in the respective landscape: The massive concrete walls, seemingly windowless from the outside, are tilted backwards at 85 degrees and grouped around a central landscaped courtyard, which was supposed to be used as an amphitheater. Derived from the symmetrical relief blocks of Uxmal, the precast concrete blocks that make up the enormous Ennis House create an inward-looking architecture. Robert Stacy-Judd, perhaps the founder of the Mayan Revival in the United States, on the other hand, is more associated with borrowed ornaments, which he translates into fantastic architectural assemblages, while the building structure and its organisation in space are not the main source of his inspiration.⁶⁰ The Mayan Revival style spread throughout the United States, most prominently on the West Coast, and can be found in numerous hotel architectures, such as Robert Stacy-Judd's *Aztec Hotel* in Monrovia, in theatres and cinemas, in private villas, and in apartment buildings.⁶¹

⁵⁸ See Berger (2006), 32.

⁵⁹ Holly Barnet-Sánchez, "The Necessity of Pre-Columbian Art in the United States", in: *Collecting the Pre-Columbian Past: A Symposium of Dumbarton Oaks*, ed. Elizabeth Hill Boone, Washington, D.C. 1993, 177-207: 188.

⁶⁰ See for example David Gebhard, *Robert Stacy-Judd – Maya Architecture and the Creation of a New Style*, Santa Barbara 1993.

⁶¹ Marjorie Ingle, in her still unsurpassed book on the Mayan Revival style, carefully examines countless examples. For a theoretical assessment, see Ruth Anne Phillips, "'Pre-Columbian Revival': Defining and Exploring a U.S. Architectural Style, 1910–1940", PhD thesis, The City University of New York, 2007.

[33] A very different form of integrating native elements to emphasise what is genuinely Mexican or Pan-American is to assign national significance to materials and spaces. Since the 1940s, national connotations have enhanced the status of the volcanic landscape of the Pedregal, south of Mexico City, in particular. As a sign of not only pre-Hispanic, but even prehistoric times, the volcanic stone is linked to the land itself, becoming the very material that typifies the nation. In this process, the discourses that had monumentalised the Mexican volcanoes and turned their solidified lava into a national topography are revived, an ideal that had been prepared by José María Velasco's paintings of the volcanoes and the valley of Mexico City in the nineteenth century, and later continued by Dr. Atl, who attentively followed the birth and formation of the Parícutín volcano on canvas in 1943.⁶²

[34] At the *Palacio Azteca* in Paris in 1889, the idea of technological progress, concretely expressed in the architectural structure, was (seemingly) in contrast to the official academic style of painting displayed inside:⁶³ almost all the professors of the Academia de San Carlos were French-trained, and many of them exhibited their work in France in 1889. The established academy painter José María Velasco, who had already exhibited at the Philadelphia world's fair in 1876, where he was awarded a gold medal, and at the World Cotton Centennial in New Orleans in 1884,⁶⁴ presided over the art section of the Mexican pavilion, where 68 of his own paintings were on show.⁶⁵ In a Realistic style, he established the vision of picturesque landscapes in the Valley of Mexico with its two iconic volcanoes, elevating the scenery into a 'national' landscape and presenting it to an international audience as specifically Mexican.⁶⁶ At the same time, the Valley of Mexico was the traditional homeland of the Nahuatl, the descendants of the Aztecs, and the

⁶² Cf. the chapter "Evolution und Revolution in der mexikanischen Vulkanikonografie", in: Kirsten Einfeldt, *Moderne Kunst in Mexiko. Raum, Material und nationale Identität*, Bielefeld 2010, 161-174. For a perspective that combines geography with art and cultural history, see: Karina E. Campos Linares, *El paisaje del Pedregal de San Ángel (= Geocalli. Cuadernos de Geografía. Universidad de Guadalajara 17* (2016), no. 33).

⁶³ On the significance of the Academia de San Carlos in constructing a Mexican national identity at the turn of the century, see: Widdifield (1996). For a comprehensive and critical overview of (history) painting during the *Porfiriato* period, see: *Los pinceles de la Historia. La fabricación del Estado, 1864–1910*, exh. cat., Mexico-City 2003.

⁶⁴ In New Orleans, the Mexican government decided against an indigenist structure and in favour of an orientalist architecture based on the Moorish heritage of Spain; the pavilion has even been described as a "Mexican Alhambra"; see Tenorio-Trillo (1996), 40-43 and Douglas (2018).

⁶⁵ He was again commissioner at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 and exhibited his own works. See Tenorio-Trillo (1996), 55.

⁶⁶ See the chapter "Landscapes and Identities: Mexico, 1850–1900", in: *Nature, Empire, and Nation. Explorations of the History of Science in the Iberian World*, ed. Jorge Cañizares-Esguerra, Stanford 2006, 129-168.

idealisation of this landscape fuelled indigenist efforts to construct an Aztec antiquity.⁶⁷ Breaking with the picturesque, Velasco often incorporated into his landscapes precisely those signs of technological progress that supported the *Porfiriato*: his paintings *Puente de Metlac* and *Cañada de Metlac* (Fig. 12) were among those attracting the most attention in the exhibition, and both depict steam trains winding their way through wild expanses, demonstrating the function of technology in domesticating nature. And here the painter echoes the discourse of colonial painting: moving into unfamiliar land, unknown and potentially dangerous, a wild 'Other', is a leitmotif of colonial discourses.⁶⁸



12 José María Velasco, *Cañada de Metlac (The Metlac Ravine)*, 1893, oil on canvas, 104 × 160,5 cm. Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City (photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#))

[35] Continuing such discourses, from 1947 onwards the architect Luis Barragán built luxurious villas on part of the already established 'national topography' of the Pedregal, using concrete and glass as building materials, with a decidedly modernist form in the spirit of the International Style, and fully incorporating the surrounding landscape into the structure of the houses and their gardens (Fig. 13). It was this form of building out of the given landscape that earned Barragán the reputation of being the founder of Critical Mexican Regionalism.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ See Widdifield (1996), 100: "When speaking of the pre-Hispanic Indian, of ancient indigenous culture, the nineteenth-century Mexican culturati rarely passed up the opportunity to compare them to the cultures of the Old World and especially to classical antiquity. The point of comparison was always there, whether Indian ceramics were being likened to Greek amphorae or deities were being re-created as the New World Zeus or Apollo." The construction of an American antiquity had predecessors in the colonial period and came from an external perspective on Latin America, similar to the operation described by Karl-Heinz Kohl, "Antike in der Südsee. Körperdarstellungen in den Illustrationen von Reiseberichten des 18. und frühen 19. Jahrhunderts", in: *Fremde Körper: zur Konstruktion des Anderen in europäischen Diskursen*, ed. Kerstin Gernig, Berlin 2001, 147-175.

⁶⁸ See for example Tanja Michalsky, *Projektion und Imagination. Die niederländische Landschaft der Frühen Neuzeit im Diskurs von Geografie und Malerei*, Munich 2011.



13 Prieto López House, Jardines del Pedregal, Mexico City, 1948–1951, south-east patio with swimming pool; architect: Luis Barragán, photographer: Armando Salas Portugal (© Barragan Foundation / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2023)

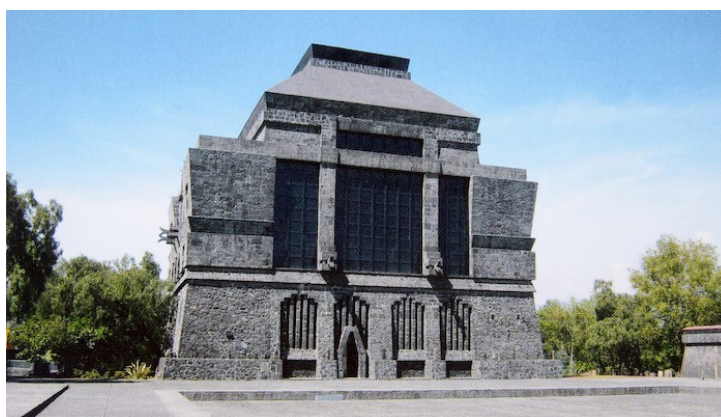
[36] This form of regionalism is completely different from the folkloristic ornamental and formal adaptations of indigenous examples, as discussed at the beginning of our considerations with the exhibition architectures and the Mayan Revival style. And yet, here too, the inclusion of elements that are simultaneously indigenous, anti-European, traditional, and national, creates a form of architecture that can be characterised as regionalist – and indigenist. This regionalist architecture is thus positioned, on the one hand, within the international positive revaluation, popularisation, and commercialisation of the folkloric as national and intrinsic (and its presentation at world

⁶⁹ See Giulia Mela, "Luis Barragán and the Invention of Mexican Regionalism", in: *Regionalism, Nationalism & Modern Architecture. Proceedings* [International conference, CEAA, Porto, October 25-27, 2018], 237-249, <http://hdl.handle.net/10400.26/24595> (accessed September 25, 2023). Critical Regionalism initially describes an architectural movement that aims to counter the global phenomenon of the International Style with a vocabulary of forms which, while adopting 'modern' aesthetics, ties them to geographical and cultural contexts. Critical Regionalism is an innovative approach that mediates between global and local aesthetics and, in this sense, undertakes to re-localise modernism. See: Kenneth Frampton, "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance", in: *The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Postmodern Culture*, ed. Hal Foster, Seattle 1983, 16-30; Vincent B. Canizaro, ed., *Architectural Regionalism: Collected Writings on Place, Identity, Modernity, and Tradition*, New York 2007; Tom Avermaete, Veronique Patteeuw, Hans Teerds and Lea-Catherine Szacka, eds., *Critical Regionalism Revisited* (= *Oase. Journal for Architecture* no. 103 [2019]). – There is a podcast that discusses the architectural project of the Pedregal and its specific relationship to the surrounding nature: Emmett FitzGerald (producer), "Depave Paradise", 99 Percent Invisible Podcast (May 28, 2019), <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/depave-paradise/> (accessed September 25, 2023), transcript available at: <https://99percentinvisible.org/episode/depave-paradise/transcript/> (September 25, 2023). – Gayatri Spivak adopted the concept of Critical Regionalism for cultural studies; in *Who Sings the Nation-State? Language, Politics, Belonging* (co-edited with Judith Butler, London/New York/Calcutta 2007, 91), she proposes a deconstructivist alternative to nationalism that breaks down normative national identities: "Derrida will later call this undoing of the connection between birth and citizenship the deconstruction of genealogy in *Politics of Friendship*. And that is where critical regionalism begins."

expositions, e.g. the regionalist-folkloric 'villages');⁷⁰ but on the other hand, thanks to its modernist form, it is still a means of expressing modernity and cosmopolitanism unabatedly. Mexico was thus attempting to position itself within the global movement of modernism, while at the same time practicing a form of self-folklorisation designed to claim a firm place within Mexican national identities and to convey a positive image of the post-revolutionary state to the outside world.

[37] In general, the first form of architectural indigenism was dominant in the 1920s and 1930s, while the latter came to the fore in the 1940s – but there was some overlap, and no single unified development can be discerned. It is interesting to note, however, that Mexico's pavilions at world's fairs after 1929 (and before the Second World War), namely Paris in 1937 and New York in 1939, were not indigenist in concept or style, but followed the International Style – even though the presentations inside the pavilions had hardly changed. Ethnographic artefacts, costumes, and tourist destinations continued to be displayed, and traditional dances and ceremonies were still performed.⁷¹

[38] Diego Rivera's studio house, built in the lava field of the Pedregal, exemplifies the overlap of the two indigenist architectural concepts. In the residential studio called *Anahuacalli* (Fig. 14), which also housed his collection of pre-Hispanic art, this collecting practice was literally combined with the production of his own modernist work.



14 *Casa Estudio Anahuacalli*, Mexico City, architects: Juan O'Gorman and Diego Rivera, built 1944–1963 (reprod. from: Andres Lepik and Vera Simone Bader, eds., *Lina Bo Bardi 100*, exh. cat. Architekturmuseum TU München, Ostfildern-Ruit 2014, 163)

⁷⁰ For (European) architectural regionalism, see Eric Storm, "International Exhibitions as Global Platforms of Exchange. Regionalist Pavilions at the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego and the Ibero-American Exhibition in Seville, 1915–1929", in: *Picturesque Modernities: Architectural Regionalism as a Global Process, 1890–1950*, ed. Michael Falser, Rennes (forthcoming); Eric Storm, *The Culture of Regionalism. Art, Architecture and International Exhibitions in France, Germany and Spain, 1890–1939*, Manchester/New York 2010; Michael Falser, *Angkor in France: From Plaster Casts to Exhibition Pavilions*, Berlin 2020; for the positive reevaluation of folklore at world expositions, see Wyss (2010).

⁷¹ For Paris, see Tenorio-Trillo (1996), 237-239; for New York: *Luis Márquez in the World of Tomorrow: Mexican Identity and the 1939–40 New York World's Fair*, eds. Itala Schmelz and Ernesto Peñaloza, exh. cat., New York/Mexico City 2012, 186-196; Oesterreich (2020).

The building, designed by Rivera in collaboration with architect Juan O’Gorman, draws eclectically on selected forms of indigenous stone construction. Its shape is reminiscent of the ancient pyramids of the high plateau around Mexico City, indeed it was intended to be a reinterpretation of a *teocalli*, a step pyramid with a temple on top. The entrance arches quote the Mayan vault. These forms are repeated in the interior in the display of artefacts and they are combined with a modernist studio section with a fully glazed front. The way up to the light-flooded studio is through the narrow, winding stone corridors of the lower floors, most of which are completely unlit by daylight. This gives the impression of walking through the inner depths of a step pyramid (although this was hardly possible given their ruinous state at the time). The building material is also significant. Located in San Pablo Tepetla, just outside the city center, the building is constructed of the local dark volcanic stone, *tezontle*, and is so embedded in the volcanic landscape and its rock formations of the Pedregal that, apart from the obvious hewn stone, there is no discernible difference between the building material and the ground. Rivera had contacted Frank Lloyd Wright to discuss how the building could be harmoniously integrated into its surroundings, and Wright became directly involved in the design.⁷² This demonstrates not only the transnational networks of which the Mexican avant-garde artists were a part, but also that the recourse to the traditional and, in particular, the pre-colonial aesthetic repertoire by no means excluded an engagement with and contribution to the lineaments of the cosmopolitan-modernist tradition. On the contrary, indigenist cultural appropriation and modernist reinterpretation of the pre-colonial led to a uniquely modern form of 'transnational nationalism'.⁷³

[39] This can be well illustrated by another example, Diego Rivera’s presence at the Golden Gate International Exposition in San Francisco in 1940. Rivera was invited to take part in the "Art in Action" exhibition, where artists were to work directly on and during the exhibition and be observed by the public. The Mexican artist painted a monumental fresco that was considered the main work of the exhibition and was entitled *Pan-American Unity* (Fig. 15).

⁷² See <http://museoanahuacalli.org.mx/museo/edificio/> (accessed September 25, 2023).

⁷³ For a theorisation of 'transnational nationalism' in a more recent and political context, see Riva Kastoryano, "Transnational Nationalism: Redefining Nation and Territory", in: *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances*, eds. Seyla Benhabib, Ian Shapiro and Danilo Petranovich, Cambridge (UK) 2007, 159-178, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511808487>.



15 Diego Rivera, *Pan-American Unity*, 1940, fresco on plaster, 6,70 × 22,60 m, detail: Mardonio Magaña sculpting a feathered serpent. City College of San Francisco (© Banco de México Diego Rivera & Frida Kahlo Museums Trust / VG Bild-Kunst, Bonn 2023)

Perhaps for the last time before the entry of the United States into the Second World War, the idea of Pan-Americanism was celebrated, with explicit reference to and inspiration from the advanced civilisations of Mesoamerica, and made world famous through the medium of a world exposition.⁷⁴ The central section of the fresco shows the contemporary Mexican sculptor Mardonio Magaña at work on a monumental feathered serpent. Here, Rivera extrapolates the history of recourse to ancient Mexican advanced civilisations as part of the broader Pan-American aesthetic tested and popularised at the world's fairs – explicitly positioning Magaña as a link between pre-colonial art, modernist art practice and the international exhibition context. Rivera had 'discovered' the already 52-year-old Magaña as a sculptor and interpreted his work in terms of primitivism. An autodidact, Magaña spent most of his life working among *campesinos*, small farmers. In a tribute published in the magazine *Espacios*, Rivera described him as belonging to the "línea de la tradición plástica de Anáhuac", as a successor to the sculptural tradition of the Aztecs.⁷⁵ Rivera thus interprets his work as a continuation of the tradition of pre-colonial art within modernism, underlined by the fact that Magaña was allowed to work on a feathered serpent. The deity Quetzalcoatl/Kukulcán, worshipped by all ancient Mexican cultures, links the past with the present, as the story goes that the mythical god will one day return and rebuild his

⁷⁴ On the significance of the Quetzalcoatl myth for aesthetic Pan-Americanism, see: Stephen M. Park, "Hemispheric Mythologies: Rethinking the History of the Americas through Simon Bolívar and Quetzalcoatl", in: idem, *The Pan American Imagination. Contested Visions of the Hemisphere in Twentieth-Century Literature*, Charlottesville 2014, 55-88.

⁷⁵ Diego Rivera, "Mardonio Magaña", in: *Espacios* [Mexico City], no. 1 (September 1948), 5-6: 5.

kingdom.⁷⁶ The execution of Rivera's artwork at the world's fair in San Francisco thus also demonstrated the North American West Coast's aspirations to modernity, while at the same time inscribing itself in the tradition of Pan-American aesthetics, in contrast to the East Coast, which was strongly oriented towards European aesthetics.

Conclusion

[40] The presentation of the Mexican nation at international expositions and world's fairs through indigenist architectures valorised the category of indigeneity, highlighting its potential to forge identity and, to paraphrase Eric Hobsbawm, to act as a productive factor in the process of nation-building.⁷⁷ Within this constellation, Mexico also satisfied a cosmopolitan need for the 'exotic', which, especially at international exhibitions, established a hierarchical ascription of modernity to the industrial nations, while backwardness was located in the 'exotic' colonies. Resisting this practice of binary categorisation, Mexico strategically harnessed indigeneity to position itself within the cosmopolitan and undoubtedly modern industrial nations, which also exhibited and created their own metropolises and peripheries.

[41] The 'costuming' of technological progress with conservative stylistic devices such as classicist architectural elements, female personifications or sublime landscapes is not a singular phenomenon at world's fairs. Rather, these seem to have generally helped to cushioning and domesticating the shock of industrialisation and its mechanisms of alienation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: 'new' allegories in traditional form massively promoted the telegraph, electricity and new means of transport.⁷⁸ However, while classicist elements were predominantly appropriated in Europe and North America, the Mexican presentation returned to its 'own' past – to an ancient American or specifically Aztec antiquity and to a 'Mexican indigenous' folklore, defining the nation as simultaneously national-Mexican and international-cosmopolitan and modern. Far from being mutually exclusive, modernist and traditionalist aspects of nationalist discourse produced a form of nationalist modernism or folkloric cosmopolitanism. In this context, the world's fairs functioned as a kind of catalyst for the elaboration and dissemination of indigenist ideas, as an intersection where the discourses of tradition and modernity, center and periphery, and regionalism and cosmopolitanism are hybridised, accelerated, and given new momentum. The representation of the 'Self' and the 'Other', and the reception of this binary, take place in cultural arenas where dominance is fiercely contested, and world expositions are important such cultural arenas.

⁷⁶ See for example William M. Ringle et al., "The Return of Quetzalcoatl: Evidence for the Spread of a World Religion during the Epiclassic Period", in: *Ancient Mesoamerica* 9 (1998), no. 2, 183-232.

⁷⁷ Cf. Eric Hobsbawm, "Inventing Traditions", in: *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, Cambridge (UK) 2009 [original ed. 1983], 1-14.

⁷⁸ Cf. Miriam Oesterreich, *Bilder konsumieren. Inszenierungen 'exotischer' Körper in früher Bildreklame, 1880–1914*, Paderborn 2018; Ulrike Gall, *Weibliche Personifikationen in Allegorien des Industriezeitalters. Motivhistorische Studien zu Kontinuität und Wandel bildlicher Verkörperungen, 1870–1912*, Konstanz 1999.

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