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National Network of Art Libraries in Mexico
Investig@rte

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Summary

Mexican art is enormously rich, covering a period from 2500 BC until today. It has various styles, the product of its indigenous, mixed and Mexican cultures.

Indigenous culture offers a range of cultural expressions, the most significant being Olmec, Teotihuacan, Zapotec, Mixtec, Mayan and Aztec. During the colonial period, these forms mixed with European art brought via Spain, while monotheist Catholicism imposed itself on the pre-Hispanic polytheism.

At the end of the Spanish colonial period, Mexican culture emerged, combining indigenous and Spanish elements. The indigenous languages were spoken by a minority and Mexican Castilian was spoken by the majority.

If culture is expressed via language and speech is combined with writing, then Mexico's cultural richness must be demonstrated through the content of writings and other documents found in libraries.

Aim

The aim is to create a **National Network of Art Libraries in Mexico** through the Art Section of the Asociación Mexicana de Bibliotecarios, A.C., which can publicise the richness of Mexican culture.

Priorities

Mexico City has 100 libraries and document collections on Mexican art. These can form the basis for the creation of the **National Network of Art Libraries in Mexico**, which reach across national and international frontiers. The following priorities have been established:

1. To invite libraries that have collections of the visual arts, architecture, literature, theatre, music and dance to participate;
2. To propose guidelines to establish the network;
3. To upgrade the directory of libraries and document collections on Mexican art;
4. To re-establish the art section of the Asociación Mexicana de Bibliotecarios (AMBAC);
5. To study and analyse art library networks, such as the VITRUBIO network in Argentina;
6. To establish guidelines to create the network;

Developing the project

The existing elements to develop this project are the “Libraries and art collections in Mexico” directory on the Mex@arte web, the **MÉXICOARTE** database on Mexican plastic arts and architecture, the restricted glossary of terms created from that database and the PEPENAR collective catalogue of periodicals (Periodicals on Latin American art and architecture).

The word “pepenar”¹ is a Mexican term that means to gather, search through or take one or more things from among others. That is how library networks, which provide access to information, enable users to take one or more pieces of data or themes from among several archives, libraries and museums, letting them find the collection that is of most interest.

Another collective catalogue of periodicals is SERIUNAM, drawn up by the Department of Libraries at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), which can be consulted online.

The 219 current periodical titles available on the website of library at the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas are a sample of what a library can bring to the project. The site also includes links allowing access to the indices. The same library also has its BEXART database, which has 10,796 records of exhibition catalogues, again benefiting this project.

Challenges and thinking

The first time that the representatives of Mexican art libraries met was in 1984, when the art section of AMBAC was formed. This operated until 1992, when it was decided to expand art to include literature, theatre, music and dance. This meant that all the collections of the CENART Art Library could participate, while the library of UNAM’s Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, which also has collections in these fields, showed interest in organising this network.

The challenges are as follows:

1. Ensuring the co-operation of Mexico’s leading libraries of art collections;
2. Keeping the directory of libraries and the respective links to their web-pages up to date;
3. Continuing to expand the PEPENAR collective catalogue, which currently covers 400 periodicals;
4. Organising the existing restricted glossary of art terms into a thesaurus;
5. Co-operating with the **MÉXICOARTE** database, which currently has 4,000 records and 94 periodicals;
6. Expanding the themes on the Mex@arte web-page, which combines information on art from the pre-Hispanic, colonial, modern and contemporary periods with the plastic arts and Mexican architecture. It also contains full-text magazines and tables of contents;
7. Managing to reopen the art libraries section of AMBAC to consolidate the network internationally;
8. Publicise Mexico’s cultural and artistic richness, which is the essential aim of this project.

¹ José G. Moreno de Alba, *Minucias del lenguaje*. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1992, pp. 223 and 311.

The Art Section of the Asociación Mexicana de Bibliotecarios A.C. (AMBAC)

History

AMBAC is the Mexican association of librarians and has been constantly active since 1954. The Art Section was founded in 1984, and includes libraries and document collections on art and architecture. Forty libraries and collections were invited to participate and their data was published in the *International Directory of Art Libraries*, an online directory of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA).

In 1992, the chairman of AMBAC requested that the section not only cover art, but the arts in general (literature, theatre, music and dance). This means that until today, the project for the Network of Art Libraries in Mexico has considered the possibility of reviving this section.

Aims:

1. To encourage the use of art libraries and audiovisual resources through publications such as directories, bibliographies, bulletins, reports and databases to retrieve information on the arts;
2. To foster research that will bring new developments in art librarianship, documentation and audiovisual collections;
3. To list Mexican libraries that have art documentation holdings;
4. To make contact with Mexican and international organisations that have similar aims;
5. To stimulate ongoing training in librarianship among members, the exchange of ideas and all aspects of technical support.

Goals:

The association's underlying goals of education and information can be achieved through conferences, seminars, round-tables, publications, web-pages, chat-rooms, etc.

Activities:

1. Maintaining updated information in IFLA's *International Directory of Art Libraries*;
2. Organising courses on information resources in master's and doctoral degrees in the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters at UNAM;
3. Working on the **MEXICOARTE** database, which is currently available with around 4,500 records on the web-page of UNAM's Libraries Department;
4. Indexing the new series of "Artes de México" magazine (nos. 1-34, 1988-1997) and including it in the **MEXICOARTE** database;
5. Compiling biographical information on approximately 2,000 Mexican artists and sending it to the Union List of Artist Names at the Getty Trust;
6. Creating a collective catalogue of Latin American periodicals (approximately 400 titles) on art and architecture that are available in Mexican libraries. This is called PEPENAR (Periodicals on Latin American art and architecture);
7. Running a course on art libraries as part of the post-graduate programme in librarianship at the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters, UNAM;
8. Operating the Mex@rte web-page, which is of interest to people searching for bibliographical information on Mexican plastic arts and architecture from the pre-Hispanic, colonial, modern and contemporary periods;
9. Creating a restricted glossary of terms used in the plastic arts and architecture.