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THE MOSAICS OF CIUDAD UNIVERSITARIA: MEXICAN MURALISM AT THE
CROSSROADS

By

Annemarie Elizabeth Carney
B. A., Transylvania University 2016

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A Thesis Approved on

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ABSTRACT

THE MOSAICS OF CIUDAD UNIVERSITARIA: MEXICAN MURALISM AT THE CROSSROADS

Annemarie Elizabeth Carney

April 24, 2018

This thesis is an investigation of the mosaics developed for Ciudad Universitaria (CU) and the monumental shift in the Mexican mural movement they initiated. It is broken into four chapters each of which examine the works of one of the four major Mexican artists: David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, Juan O’Gorman and José Chávez Morado commissioned to develop mosaics for CU in the early 1950s. It emphasizes the differences in the artists’ ideologies and experiences which led each to develop an individual understanding of plastic integration and the ways in which those ideas manifest themselves in the campus mosaics. The individual purpose of each mosaic is examined in relation to its location on campus, the purpose of the building it adorns, and the needs of the university. Each artist’s understanding of plastic integration and overall body of work is considered in relation to the building and location to which they were assigned.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of University City (Ciudad Universitaria, CU) in the late 1940s and early 1950s was a pivotal moment in the history of the Mexican mural movement and twentieth-century Mexican art. This great architectural project was meant to consolidate the various departments of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), which, previous to the development of the campus, existed in various locations throughout Mexico City, on a modern campus. The project acted as a catalyst, transforming Mexican muralism from a rhetorical explanation of the Mexican Revolution on the walls of antiquated buildings into a study of plastic integration in the modern world, art, and architecture. This transformation was made possible as a result of the project's unprecedented goal of uniting monumental mosaics with the campus's architecture. The designs of these mosaics incorporated sculptural, architectural and environmental features in a manner that united them with the architecture of the buildings they adorned, the Mexican environment, and the cultural identity of the region. The artists commissioned failed to meet their aspirations, but the unprecedented opportunity was necessary to develop future progress.

Plastic integration is the assimilation of painted, sculptural, architectural and environmental elements into a unified work with a singular theme and purpose. In the 1950's plastic integration was at the forefront of artistic discourse in Mexico. Each artist who developed a work for University City, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Juan O'Gorman, Diego Rivera and José Chávez Morado, understood the concept of plastic integration in a

unique manner. Siqueiros envisioned plastic integration as an avenue through which to unite the environment and architecture with the work he envisioned. O’Gorman understood plastic integration as a well-rounded aesthetic union. His position as an architect allowed him to unite the architectural, sculptural and “painted” mosaic elements of the Central Library so that the entirety of the library’s exterior exists as a work of plastic integration. Rivera developed plastic integration to unify the façade of the Olympic Stadium with the environment. Unlike the other artists, Chávez Morado valued plastic integration for its social value rather than its aesthetic or artistic role. He believed that plastic integration benefited Mexico not because it furthered the Mexican mural movement but because it united workers of various backgrounds for a single project.

The choice of each of these artists to develop a work of plastic integration altered the direction of the Mexican mural movement. Previous to the creation of these works the murals and mosaics developed for the movement reiterated the importance of the Mexican Revolution in symbolic and inaccessible manners that did little more than decorate existent interiors the general public rarely accessed. The exterior mosaics developed for CU were not only more accessible to the people but also represented a modern understanding of Mexican identity rather than the values of the Mexican Revolution. This shift away from the values of the Mexican Revolution reflects the Mexican government’s turn towards the right in the previous decade. CU was the first opportunity for the majority of these artists to develop a work that was envisioned as part of the building’s façade during construction. It was the first time that the mosaics developed by these artists were seen as an integral aspect of the building’s architecture rather than an unnecessary but pleasing addition to an interior.

It is important to note that during the late 1940s and early 1950s when CU was developed, modernism, Le Corbusier's international style, and functionalism were at the forefront of international architecture. The majority of the buildings developed for the campus reflect these architectural tendencies, avoiding unnecessary decoration and using only the necessary materials to complete construction. The choice by the leaders of the project to include exterior mosaics did not reflect these international tendencies but instead the strong tradition of Mexican muralism. Their inclusion acts as a representation of Mexican identity.

THE HISTORY OF UNAM

UNAM's lack of a unified location prior to the development of CU stems from the long history of the institution. The University of Mexico, in its original form, opened on January 25, 1553 by orders from Carlos V and existed in various institutional forms throughout the history of colonial and post-colonial Mexico.¹ In 1910 the university reopened as the University of Mexico, and in 1929 the university obtained autonomy becoming the National Autonomous University of Mexico.² The concept of a unified location was first suggested in the late 1920s and in 1930 the institution acquired land in Las Lomas de Chapultepec. An additional thirteen years occurred before authorities decided to build CU on the pedregal of San Angel and the development of the project begun. The initiation of CU had far wider implications for Mexico than the consolidation of UNAM's various departments into a central campus. In fact, while UNAM's consolidation highly benefitted the university as a whole, the architectural project primarily sought to develop a modern campus that would not only present modern ideas to the university's students but also act as a catalyst for further modernization within the country.

Headed by Carlos Lazo, the campus's development, a highly ambitious project, enlisted the leading architects, engineers, and artists of Mexico working together

¹ José Sarukhán et al., *La Arquitectura de la Ciudad Universitaria* (Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1994), 14.

² Sarukhán, *La Arquitectura*, 14.

to develop an institution with architecture inspired by Le Corbusier's international style and plastic integration, which highlighted important aspects of the post-Revolutionary Mexican culture of the mid-twentieth-century. Lazo originally presented the development of CU as the first great opportunity for plastic integration within Mexico. Its original conception would require the development of modern buildings in tandem with monumental mosaics and would require architects and artists to work together and share ideas. Despite the unison required for the development of this project there was no central scheme of architectural design or mural production outlined by a committee. The artists and architects commissioned for the project were free to develop their own concepts and designs. Interestingly, despite the left winged tendencies of the artists commissioned to develop works for CU, this freedom did not result in highly overt leftist compositions but instead reflected the more common values of the period. Only Siqueiros included collectivist imagery representative of communism and even this imagery was developed in a muted tone.

David Alfaro Siqueiros highly supported this unified development which would have created buildings with architecture specifically designed to interact with the monumental mosaic that adorned its façade. True plastic integration, at least as defined by Siqueiros, required that all aspects of the work be designed with the other aspects in mind and to specifically interact with them. Although the majority of the artists presented with a commission to develop a work for CU were ultimately not provided the opportunity to work alongside the architects who designed the campus, the project opened the doors for future unified development and provided each artist with an opportunity to develop his understanding of plastic integration. The decision to develop

the unification of modernity with Mexican identity and culture within the campus is further strengthened by the development of CU on the pedregal of San Angel. Pedregal is both the black lava rock native to the region of Mexico City upon which CU was developed and the name of the region. The pedregal remains throughout the university and constitutes an important aspect of the works developed by both Diego Rivera and Juan O’Gorman. The remaining rock merges the modern architecture of CU with the natural beauty of Mexico and pre-Columbian mythology, connecting modernity with formative Mexican history.

The mosaics developed for CU play an integral role in the development of a modern Mexican campus. The power of each mosaic is strengthened by the fact that the majority of the institution’s buildings are not adorned with these works, and the ones that are have been chosen for specific reasons. The commissions for these mosaics were arguably given with these reasons in mind and, as a result, each mosaic loosely relates to these purposes.

PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY OF THESIS

This thesis will examine the works of the four major Mexican artists, David Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, Juan O’Gorman and José Chávez Morado, who were commissioned to develop mosaics for CU in the early 1950s. This work explores the unique manner in which each artist developed a modern work of plastic integration for the university. It will focus on the differences in the artists’ ideologies and experiences that led each to develop an individual understanding of plastic integration and the life force of modern Mexican society. The individual purpose of each work will be examined in relation to its location on campus, the purpose of the building that it adorns, and the needs and goals of the university. Moreover, this study considers how each artist’s understanding of plastic integration relates to the building and location to which he was assigned. How, if at all, did the artist’s overall body of work influence the commission they received? What is represented within the mosaic, and how does this imagery relate to the purpose of the building?

This thesis is broken into four chapters and a conclusion. Each chapter will examine an individual artist and the mosaic he created at CU within the context of his body of work. Siqueiros received a commission to develop a work for the Rectory Tower, Rivera the Olympic Stadium, O’Gorman the Central Library and Chávez Morado the Faculty Science Building which now houses UNAM’s architectural program.

David Alfaro Siqueiros enthusiastically supported the project to develop CU when it was first announced. He strongly believed that the opportunity for plastic

integration provided by the campus's development would provide the spark necessary to push the Mexican mural movement and Mexican art in general into its next phase.

Despite being denied the opportunity to work with the project's architectural team, Siqueiros could witness how each of the artists commissioned by Lazo developed a work of plastic integration. The opportunity forever changed the relationship between Mexican murals and the buildings they adorned although not in the radical political direction that Siqueiros had hoped for. Although Siqueiros was disappointed in Lazo's decision to exclude Mexican artists in CU's architectural development, he accepted a commission to develop a mosaic for the university. Siqueiros designed three panels for the Rectorry Tower: *The People of the University, the University for the People, The Right to Culture, and New University Symbol*. In order to maintain some connection with plastic integration, Siqueiros developed a mosaic in a style he described as "sculpted painting" which incorporated sculptural relief in the mosaic's design. He argued that this style allowed passing motorists to easily interact with the work. It is interesting that Siqueiros, one of the three great Mexican muralists and a strong supporter of progress, was commissioned to develop a mosaic for the Rectorry Tower. The building both housed CU's important offices and was the first building students saw when entering campus from the original student drop-off location. Siqueiros highlighted the importance of the Rectorry Tower with *The People of the University, the University for the People*, which welcomes students to CU and beckons them towards progress. While Siqueiros strongly supported future progress and believed that the activities of the present reformed Mexican culture, he also believed that several defining moments in Mexican history must be remembered. He recorded these dates in *the Right to Culture*.

Juan O’Gorman, the only muralist also commissioned to develop the architecture of the building his mosaic adorns, was not only a well-known Mexican artist but also an important architect known for his functionalist style. Nearly a decade and a half prior to receiving the commission to develop the architecture of CU’s Central Library, O’Gorman designed highly efficient, low-cost schools for Mexico City. His fame as an architect of highly functional spaces was the likely reason for his commission as the architect of the Central Library. Unlike many of CU’s building, the library is used by the majority of the student body and required an efficient design to ease student use. O’Gorman designed the *Historical Representation of Culture* as a codex that outlines a symbolic representation of Mexican history beginning with the pre-Columbian era and ending in the modern age. He integrated the pre-Columbian tendencies of this work with the modern architecture of the library with a pedregal rock wall outside of the library. He further integrated the work with the building by developing it as a codex. He made the external walls of the library, which houses the university’s texts, a book. His work symbolizes the influence of history on modern Mexico.

Diego Rivera, the only artist commissioned to develop a mosaic for CU who did not complete his original design, created *The University, the Mexican Family, Peace and Youth Sports*, which adorns the façade of the Olympic Stadium. It was originally meant to surround the stadium’s exterior. However, he only completed the central panel. In its original form, the mosaic represented the history of sport in Mexico and highlighted the importance of sports to the University and Mexican society as a whole. Like O’Gorman’s mosaic, Rivera’s work illustrates the influence of history on modern Mexico. The artist’s understanding of plastic integration was very different from that of

Siqueiros's. While both artists believed plastic integration required unity of architecture, mosaic, and sculpture, Siqueiros sought to develop works which stood out to passing viewers while Rivera aimed to develop a work that strongly merged with the surrounding environment. It is for this reason that Rivera's commission to develop the mosaic for the Olympic Stadium is fitting. The stadium is sunk into the ground and it reflects the appearance of a volcano. Rivera made use of pedregal stone within the mosaic and further tied the appearance of the stadium to the surrounding environment.

Unlike the other artists commissioned to develop works for CU, José Chávez Morado developed two mosaics: *The Return of Quetzalcoatl* and *The Conquest of Energy*. *The Return of Quetzalcoatl* is a symbolic representation of the various cultural influences that helped to form Mexican society and a reflection of the need for workers from all specializations to unite. *The Conquest of Energy* represents the development of humanity from the dark, which symbolizes ignorance, to the light, which reveals knowledge and technology. Chávez Morado believed that plastic integration required workers from a variety of specializations to work together to develop a single cohesive piece. Within his work for the university, Chávez Morado develops plastic integration through designing compositional elements that mimic the architecture of the faculty science building they adorn. The scientific theme of *the Conquest of Energy* further integrated the work and the building. The pool of water in front of *The Return of Quetzalcoatl* provided the work with environmental integration.

While the mosaics vary widely in appearance and content, several overarching characteristics are common to each of them. All of the works relate to the purpose of the building which they adorn. Siqueiros's mosaic reflects the mission of the university.

O’Gorman’s, developed as a codex, creates an external representation of the internal content of the Central Library. The completed panel of Rivera’s mosaic depicts the importance of sports to Mexican society. Chávez Morado’s *The Conquest of Energy* echoed the original scientific purpose of the building which it adorns.

Each of the mosaics is also in its own way a work of plastic integration. They are united by the architectural and environmental features which surround them. *The People of the University, the University for the People*, although developed by Siqueiros, the strongest proponent of plastic integration of the four artists, is the least integrated with the architecture it adorns but the most experimental. Siqueiros developed new techniques in order to complete the mosaic and emphasized the importance of uniting sculptural elements with painted elements to develop the work. O’Gorman’s mosaic, the *Historical Representation of Culture*, is unsurprisingly the successful work of plastic integration of any of the completed mosaics. His commission to develop the architecture of the Central Library, as well as the mosaic on its exterior, provided him with an opportunity to develop the two pieces as a singular work with a singular purpose. Rivera’s *the University* would have been the most successful work of plastic integration of all the mosaic if it had been completed. The pedregal stone and relief sculpture of the work allowed him to develop a mosaic that literally completed the architecture of the Olympic Stadium and united it with the environment. *The Conquest of Energy* and *The Return of Quetzalcoatl* mimic the architecture of the building which they adorn. However, more importantly, these mosaics, developed by Chávez Morado, depict individuals working together to reach the destination of modernity. The artist symbolically used plastic

integration and the unity it required to represent the unity he believed to be necessary for progress within Mexico.

As a whole, these mosaics stand out as the first works of the Mexican mural movement designed for new architecture and meant to interact with it. They do more than simply decorate a wall and reiterate the story of the Mexican Revolution. Rather, they unite a variety of compositional elements often seen as incompatible in order to develop a single work that reflects Mexican culture, the environment, and the modern concepts important to the mid-twentieth-century. These works proved that plastic integration was not only possible but a significant avenue through which the next phase of Mexican muralism would be developed despite not being completely realized.

The existent literary material on the development of CU, such as *La Arquitectura de la Ciudad Universitaria*, published in 1994 by CU's architectural program, focuses on the architectural development of the campus and makes only brief reference to highly influential mosaics developed for the project. A number of art historical texts also exist, such as Raquel Tibol's *Siqueiros; Vida y Obra*, published in 1974, which briefly describes one or more of the mosaics developed for the project on a case-by-case basis in a more broad discussion of the artist's overall body of work. In addition, each of the artists discussed produced autobiographical texts that analyze the mosaics developed for CU to varying degrees. However, the historical literature neither adequately treats each of the murals developed for CU in terms of its relationship with the architecture of the campus nor accounts for the importance of the CU mosaics within the history of the Mexican mural movement or to the plastic integration movement they fostered. This thesis attempts to fill the literary void with an investigation of each artist's mosaic and

interpretation of plastic integration. That this work both analyzes the mosaics independently and unites them into one body of text in which the differences and similarities can be visualized. The mosaics created for CU propelled the Mexican mural movement into its second phase; this thesis aims to investigate how and why these works were so important.

Figure 1. Map of Ciudad Universitaria, Mexico City, Mexico.

CHAPTER I

DAVID ALFARO SIQUEIROS

David Alfaro Siqueiros enthusiastically supported the concept of University City in its early development. He believed that the architectural project would mark a crucial step towards unitary art, in which artists, architects, engineers, and builders would work together to develop a campus that truly represented modern Mexican society. In a lecture presented in October 1953, Siqueiros confessed that when the concept of a new campus of “great architectural significance” developed by Mexican workers and using Mexican materials was announced, he viewed it as a “wonderful opportunity in which architects, painters and sculptors [would] all work together.”³ Despite the disheartening reality that the architects in charge of the project did not foster this unity and refused to include the artists in the development of the campus, only commissioning them after the plans were completed, Siqueiros never faltered in his belief that CU would be one of the most important architectural projects completed within Mexico.⁴

In early 1951 Siqueiros wrote a letter to the chief architect of University City, Carlos Lazlo, outlining the reasons that the plastic integration of monumental art, rather

³ David Alfaro Siqueiros, “Precepts,” in *Art and Revolution* trans. Sylvia Calles (London: The Camelot Press Ltd, 1975), 206.

⁴ Siqueiros, “Precepts,” 206.

than its later addition, should be an important aspect of the development of University City. The artist began the letter with a statement upon which both men agreed, CU, built in the middle of Mexico City, the center of the Mexican muralism movement, could not logically be developed without painting and sculpture. The whole of Siqueiros's remaining argument rests on the acceptance of this statement. For if it was impossible to develop the architectural project without painting and sculpture, then this project was "the first opportunity" and the most legitimate location for true plastic integration. The buildings of the campus, he argued, should not be developed without consideration of the murals with which they would be decorated. Therefore, the Mexican artists who would develop these monumental works of art should be included in the planning stages of University City. Their opinions and ideas should be incorporated into the design so that a true union between the architecture and art of the campus could be developed.⁵

Carlos Lazo failed to respond to Siqueiros's enthusiasm for the plastic integration of monumental works of art with the architecture of CU. He refused to consult the artists, including Siqueiros, who were eventually commissioned to develop works of art for CU. As a result, the development of CU failed to be the momentous opportunity for a new stage of Mexican muralism that Siqueiros had originally attributed to the project.

In his 1953 lecture on the architecture and development of CU, Siqueiros articulated his reaction to the final design of CU, which despite his continued belief in the importance of the project, was an overwhelming disappointment. Siqueiros stated, "We, [the artists] can justifiably wash our hands of the results" of the project. In Siqueiros' opinion, the architecture of CU could be divided into two styles, neither of which

⁵ Siqueiros, "Plastic Integration in the University City," in *Art and Revolution* trans. Sylvia Calles (London: The Camelot Press Ltd, 1975), 99-101.

realistically represent modern Mexican society. The first of these styles is European formalism.⁶ He argued that the buildings to which this style could be attributed were built in excess. These buildings had been built for their appearance rather than their functionality. The second of these styles by which Siqueiros was arguably more horrified, was the development of buildings that attempted to recreate the appearance of pre-Columbian and Colonial architecture without taking into account the function of these ancient ruins:

They tell us that they are ‘Mexicanizing’ architecture. This is totally illogical. The pyramids were built to function as platforms for religious ceremonies... How can we utilize these truncated pyramids with their sides formed of steps as the outside steps of a hollow architecture?⁷

Siqueiros was conceptually against the appropriation of ancient architecture. He believed that the beauty and function of these ruins could not be recreated. Instead, modern buildings required the same opportunity to age and develop. He further believed that University City should represent modern Mexico, which, he believed was shaped by the present and the future rather than the past. As far as Siqueiros was concerned, modern Mexican society would have been most accurately represented through the plastic integration of architecture and art.

⁶ Siqueiros, “Precepts,” 206.

⁷ Siqueiros, “Precepts,” 208.

THE RECTORY MOSAICS

Despite his aggravation and disappointment with the development of University City, Siqueiros accepted a commission to create a large mosaic for the campus's Rectory Tower. The work is composed of three sections, each unrelated but unified in medium, color, and technique. Two of the three sections span the northern and southern facades of the base of the tower.⁸ The third section, smaller with a higher elevation, is located just below the halfway point of the tower's eastern façade.

The work's southern panel, *The People of the University, the University for the People*, 1952-1956, consists of five large male figures that represent science, technology, industry, agriculture, and culture. The emphasis of these figures is made clear by their belongings. They hold books, a compass, and an architectural model. While four of the figures look forward towards their destination and the future, the fifth looks back motioning unseen figures forward. Small figures carrying flags are visible to the far left and far right of the mosaic. These figures are indiscernible from one another because of their mass quality, many of them depicted only as heads.

The northern panel, *The Right to Culture*, composed in the same style as the southern panel, is opposite in its number of figures. While numerous figures fill the southern panel, the northern panel is composed of only a single arm with multiple hands which point in the direction of several important dates: 1520, 1810, 1857,

⁸ Mary K Coffey, "A Patriotic Sanctuary," in *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State* (London: Duke University Press, 2012), 112.

1910 and 19??. The pointing hands and single arm reflect international communist iconography. Raised fists in propaganda posters often support the communist march. Each year represents a highly significant date in Mexican history. The Spanish conquest occurred in 1520; Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1810; in 1857 the Mexican constitution was reformed; and the Mexican Revolution began in 1910. The year of “19??” represents an unknown future date that will be significant to Mexico and the continued struggle of the people.⁹ The third section, *New University Symbol*, represents the UNAM mural motif and contains no representation of Siqueiros’s ideological beliefs or Mexican society.¹⁰

The imagery and title of *The People of the University, the University for the People*, are imbued with references to Siqueiros’s socialist ideology. The title offers the most notable reference to socialism within this work. The phrase, *the University for the People*, explicitly states that an education from UMAN is not restricted to members of the upper class. The words, *for the people*, signal to the viewer that this is a university that seeks to improve the lives of the proletariat through an education that will broaden its horizons. The first half of the mural’s title, *the People of the University*, offers a clue to the identity of the individuals represented within the work. As described above, the five large male figures depicted within the mosaic’s southern panel are students who represent science, technology, industry, agriculture, and culture, each important to the lives of the proletariat. The development of scientific knowledge and technology consistently improves daily life. Agricultural and industrial jobs were the most common for members of lower social classes, and agriculture and industry are important to

⁹ Coffey, “A Patriotic Sanctuary,” 112-117.

¹⁰ Coffey, “A Patriotic Sanctuary,” 112.

sustaining society. In the case of this mural, the figure, which represents culture, fosters a culture of learning of the people for the people. The small marching figures represented in the mural's background are another reference to socialist ideologies. This indiscernible mass is representative of the proletariat and has been identified by some scholars as the people continuing the fight against capitalism.¹¹

The imagery and medium of these works are also imbued with references to Siqueiros's concept of the origins of modern Mexican society. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Siqueiros did not believe that modern Mexican society could be represented through pre-Columbian myths and colonial history. In his opinion, these remnants of the past lacked context in the twentieth century and using them as a framework for society hindered ever-important progress and creativity. "The University City is evidence of the most negative type of intellectual thought in our country today – that love for ancient things, for rusticity that seems so paradoxical in modern art."¹² This concept is most notable in his choice of medium. Siqueiros's regretted the fact that he too developed the work as a mosaic. When discussing the work, Siqueiros explained that he viewed mosaic as a flawed "archaic material."¹³ This belief presents itself also in Siqueiros's choice of imagery. Unlike the other works commissioned for University City, Siqueiros's works depict neither pre-Columbian mythology nor Mexican history. Siqueiros instead chose to represent the students of the present who would, in the future, improve their own lives and the lives of those around them through their education and the proletariat marching against capitalism. The only reference Siqueiros makes to

¹¹ Coffey, "A Patriotic Sanctuary," 114.

¹² Siqueiros, "Precepts," 206.

¹³ Siqueiros, "Precepts," 213.

history is the representation of the dates 1520, 1810, 1857, 1910 and 19?? on the work's northern panel.

PLASTIC INTEGRATION: CU

When the concept of University City was first brought to Siqueiros's attention, he enthusiastically viewed it as an opportunity for large-scale plastic integration. He believed that this architectural project provided the first opportunity to begin the second stage of Mexican muralism in which monumental works were not developed for existing buildings but concurrently with the architecture of the structure that the mosaics would adorn. In Siqueiros's opinion, the exterior quality of the works to be developed for University City meant that artists would not be able to develop two-dimensional works but would instead need to develop works with "a multiangular composition" that could be viewed from the "extreme angles" of a wide visual radius.¹⁴ It was important that artists were able to create works for the external environment that were not static and appeared to change with the movement of the spectator.¹⁵ The refusal of Carlos Lazo, the head architect for the project, to include the artists commissioned to create works for University City in the development of the campus's

¹⁴ Siqueiros, "Precepts," 212.

David Alfaro Siqueiros and Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y Las Artes Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, *Reencuentro con la obra mural de Siqueiros: proceso creativo del Polyforum* (Mexico City: 2003), 22. Polyangularity or multiangular organization in the context of Siqueiros's understanding of exterior murals refers to the "optical phenomenon which establishes a relationship between the movement of the spectator, distance, visible angles, and the general composition."

¹⁵ Siqueiros, "Precepts," 212.

Siqueiros and Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y Las Artes Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, *Polyforum*, 22.

architecture meant that these artists had to choose different approaches to plastic integration.

Siqueiros believed so strongly in the importance of plastic integration to the development of the Mexican mural movement that he refused to allow his separation from the architectural development of University City to prevent the infusion of plastic integration into the work he designed for the campus. Unable to unify his composition with the building's architecture, he chose to instead develop "sculptural painting." A technique that combined traditional mural style and bas-relief into a hybridization of style. This resulted in a dimensionally dynamic and active mural which lacked the compositional development present in his previous murals. As this technique was new, Siqueiros chose only to represent the most important aspects of the composition in relief. In *The People of the University, the University for the People*, only the five students in the foreground are developed as relief sculpture. Their three-dimensional quality provides the brief illusion that they are marching out of the mural and into the surrounding environment and emphasizes that their role as students links the panel to the surrounding environment. In *The Right to Culture* only one of the many hands branching off of the reaching arm, and the pencil which it grasps, are developed in relief. The hand directs the viewer's gaze to the important dates at the far left of the panel. While these sculptural elements increase the visual interaction between the mural and the viewer, the lack of compositional development weakens the work's visual dynamism. The simplicity of the work results in a composition far too abridged to hold the viewer's interest for a long period. The viewer leaves with the desire for more information. What is lost in artistic development is not recovered through the development of an active composition.

Further, although the use of relief sculpture increases the angles at which the work can be viewed, the lack of multi-angular development within the composition limits the ability of the work to change with the movement of the spectator.

Siqueiros believed that the work he developed for CU failed as a result of its isolated development which led to his inability to develop plastic integration which he viewed as the future for the Mexican Mural movement. Despite the limitations placed on Siqueiros by the architectural team's decision not to include artists in the development of CU's architecture, Siqueiros's own compositional choices, not the choices of the architects, most strongly hindered the development of plastic integration within the composition. Siqueiros developed sculptural painting to approximate plastic integration, this decision, coupled with its effects on the overall composition strongly differentiated Siqueiros's mosaic from the surrounding architecture. The large, organically shaped reliefs pose a strong antithesis to the Rectory Tower's geometric architecture. The awkward development of these reliefs combined with their large scale development leads to the appearance of these panels as an afterthought not specifically designed for the building. The simplistic quality of the composition and awkward development of the relief sculptures can, in part, be attributed to the novel quality of sculptural painting. As Siqueiros explains in regards to sculptural painting, mastering the technique and developing appropriate compositions for external murals requires much time.¹⁶ Budgetary restraints further limited Siqueiros and this prevented him from using rustproof metal to reinforce the sculptures and hindered his ability to create complex forms which would endure the elements.¹⁷

¹⁶ Siqueiros, "Precepts," 211.

¹⁷ Siqueiros, "Precepts," 212.

In the 1950s the project's architectural team located the campus bus stop directly across from the Rectory Tower. Each day when students arrived for classes they would walk past the Rectory Tower and *The People of the University, the University for the People*. Siqueiros, obviously aware of the significance of this panel's location made strong aesthetic choices that reflected its importance. Siqueiros chose to develop the panel that would gain the attention of passersby. He chose bright colors and a monumental scale for the work which both stood out from the environment and commanded convenient viewing by students. He developed the work as a sculptural painting so that those viewing it from extreme angles could access the work from the motorized vehicles that passed the Rectory Tower and to maintain attention for longer periods of time. The works' location also influenced his compositional choices. The five large figures of the panel appear to be stepping out of the work into the external environment. While this choice decreases their integration with the panel and the Rectory Tower, it increases the interaction between the figures and the students who would view the work. The fifth figure's invitation for other students to follow the group not only welcomes students to campus but highlights the significance of the Rectory Tower which houses CU's administrative offices and the nerve center for the University. When the student drop off location was changed to la Avenida de Los Insurgentes del Sur, the significance of *The People of the University, the University for the People's* location drastically decreased. As a result of this change students no longer walked past the front of the Rectory Tower each day. Instead, students passed behind the building on their way to classes and had to consciously choose to view the work.

PLASTIC INTEGRATIONS: THE POLYFORUM CULTURAL SIQUEIROS

Siqueiros never received the opportunity to develop a work of plastic integration in the manner that he had originally envisioned for University City until the mid-1960s. Between 1965 and 1971 he worked with the architects Joaquín Álvarez, Guillermo Rossel de la Lama, Ramón Mikelajáuregui, and a group of artists to develop the Polyforum Cultural Siqueiros in Mexico City. Siqueiros and the architects developed a geometric, multiangular design for the building's exterior composed of twelve jutting faces and a total of thirty-six sides. The architectural design of the building allowed Siqueiros to design an interior and exterior sculptural painting titled, *La Marcha de la Humanidad*, which he fully integrated with the architecture. It did not have the appearance of being a later addition in the manner of the panel's designed for University City. While the quality of the sculptural painting, located on the interior section of the mural, is vastly improved and far more compositionally dynamic than that of *The People of the University, the University for the People*, the exterior of the building is the clearest representation of Siqueiros's definition of plastic integration. Rather than having to design exterior sculptural elements with reinforced concrete that would be quickly damaged by environmental factors, Siqueiros used poly-angularity of the building's architecture to create visual dynamism and expressive change within the work as the viewer shifts position. The "extreme angles" from which an external mural can be viewed are made more visually stimulating by the building's unusual shape. The exterior mural is composed of twelve panels, one for each of the building's faces. Each of these

panels represents a different aspect of Mexican society and culture during the period.

The poly-angularity of the architecture means that individuals can choose to shift between viewing a single panel, in isolation, or several panels at a time, by changing their proximity to the work. Only one panel can ever be viewed head-on at a time, and one cannot view all twelve panels at once.

Despite Siqueiros's aggravation and disappointment with the development of CU and the failure of its leading architects to include painters and sculptures in the architectural process, Siqueiros still viewed it as "one of the most important projects carried out in Mexico."¹⁸ While he argued strongly that each of the murals designed for the campus be works of plastic integration, he did not refuse a commission to create a work for the University when this became an impossibility. Unwilling to abandon completely the concept, Siqueiros chose to develop panels for the rectory tower composed of sculptural painting. Despite being the only artist to create a work for CU using this technique, Siqueiros was not the only artist who included elements of plastic integration into his work. Each of the artists attempted to echo his own concept of plastic integration within his compositions.

¹⁸ Siqueiros, "Precepts," 206.

Figure 2. David Alfaro Siqueiros, *The People of the University, the University for the People*. Mosaic, 1952-1956. Rectory Tower, CU, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 3. David Alfaro Siqueiros: *The Right to Culture*. Mosaic, 1952-1956. Rectory Tower, CU, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 4. David Alfaro Siqueiros: *New University Symbol*. Mosaic, 1952-1956. Rectory Tower, CU, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 5. David Alfaro Siqueiros: *Polyforum Cultural Siqueiros*. 1965-71. Exterior, World Trade Center Mexico City, Mexico City, Mexico.

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CHAPTER II
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JUAN O'GORMAN

Unlike the rest of the artists commissioned to create works for University City, Carlos Lazo included Juan O'Gorman in the architectural development of the campus. By the 1950s O'Gorman was a well-established Mexican architect and artist. In 1949, Carlos Lazo commissioned O'Gorman, Gustavo Saavedra and Juan Martínez to design the Central Library for CU. As the only artist commissioned to both develop the architecture and a decorative work, O'Gorman had the unique opportunity to develop the plastic integration which Siqueiros so enthusiastically supported. His role allowed him to not only integrate his political ideologies into the building's architecture but to also design it as a canvas for the mosaic he envisioned.

EARLY STYLE: FUNCTIONALISM

O’Gorman began his career as an architect nearly two decades before receiving the commission to design the Central Library for CU, in 1927. During this early period, O’Gorman, a functionalist, aimed to develop architecture at “maximum efficiency and minimum cost with style.”¹⁹ One of O’Gorman’s most important early commissions was to develop the home and studio of Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo. Composed of two structures, the architecture connects the home and studio of Rivera from that of Kahlo with a walkway. He painted the exterior of each building in vivid colors and composed of floor to ceiling windows which allowed ample natural light. The architecture of the home and studio embodied functionalism. Rivera described O’Gorman’s architecture as being composed of “the most scientific functionalism,” and “a work of art,” a reaction which inspired O’Gorman’s architectural style throughout his early period.²⁰

As a result of O’Gorman’s success on the previous commission he was appointed in 1932 to the position of head of the Department of Building Construction at the Ministry of Public Education. During this period O’Gorman designed and oversaw the construction of over thirty schools in Mexico City. As in his previous construction O’Gorman followed a strict functionalist plan with each of the schools developed.²¹

¹⁹ Catherine Nixon Cooke, “A Return to the Earth: Mexico City, 1930-1960,” in *Juan O’Gorman: A Confluence of Civilizations* (San Antonio: Maverick Books, Trinity University Press, 2016), 39.

²⁰ Nixon Cooke, “A Return to the Earth,” 39.

²¹ Nixon Cooke, “A Return to the Earth,” 41.

The schools were constructed with brick and wood, and all the classrooms were the same size. Each school had a medical office and infirmary with two beds. The hallways were all the same width, the floors were cement and asphalt, and the doors and windows were metal with simple glass planes. The windows faced east or southeast to utilize the morning sun, and cross ventilation was carefully engineered.²²

Despite the urgent need in Mexico City for the development of low-cost schools for poor Mexican children, O’Gorman’s functionalist schools were met with controversy. While some, including the National Congress of Writers, Artists, and Scientists supported O’Gorman and stated that his construction was beneficial as it met “the fundamental needs of Mexico’s working classes.”²³ Others scorned him for abandoning beauty and focusing solely on utility.²⁴

Perhaps as a direct result of this scorn or possibly for completely unrelated reasons O’Gorman’s career as a functionalist architect was short-lived. Following his success developing Mexico City schools in the mid-1930s, he shifted his focus from architecture to painting and from functionalism to nationalistic narratives. O’Gorman’s paintings were based on allegory and influenced by Benozzo Gozzoli, Hieronymous Bosch, Max Ernst and Salvador Dali. Far from the works of functionalist architecture O’Gorman previously created, these works, both murals and easel paintings, over-flowed with imagery that often told a continuous tale in a single panel.²⁵ This near reversal of

²² Nixon Cooke, “A Return to the Earth,” 41-42.

²³ Nixon Cooke, “A Return to the Earth,” 44.

²⁴ Nixon Cooke, “A Return to the Earth,” 42

²⁵ Nixon Cooke, “A Return to the Earth,” 46.

materiality directly resulted from O’Gorman’s desire to create works which represented Mexican culture and history and pre-Columbian mythology.

LATER STYLE: ORGANIC MEXICAN ARCHITECTURE AND UNAM

O’Gorman returned to architecture in the late 1940s only briefly before receiving the commission to develop the Central Library for CU. The artist likely received the commission to design the Central Library as a result of the praise he had received for the functionalist and highly cost-efficient schools that he had designed nearly two decades before. Although all the buildings designed for CU were designed as part of the university and therefore served an educational purpose, the library, serves the entire student body, faculty, and staff, had an increased demand for a highly functional, economical design that would protect the school’s text collection, facilitate use by students, and function as a place of study. Although his previous designs had received high praise, the artist abandoned the functionalism of his early work and turned to an original and new style that he had developed as an artist. Inspired by the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. O’Gorman developed an architectural style that he described as “organic” architecture and combined it with the functionalist architecture for which he was known. O’Gorman’s organic designs drew upon the architecture and imagery of pre-Columbian civilizations to develop a new Mexican architecture.²⁶ This new style made use of bright colors, natural textures, indigenous decorative motifs, and mysticism while attempting not to incorporate elements of modernist architectural structures.²⁷

²⁶ Nixon Cooke, “A Return to the Earth,” 56.

²⁷ Nixon Cooke, “A Return to the Earth,” 56.

Completed in 1956, the architecture, sculpture and mosaic developed for CU's Central Library were a product of O'Gorman's attempt to integrate his concept of organic architecture with the functionalism he had previously employed, working within the budgetary and architectural restraints placed upon him by the project directors and school officials. As well as a representation of his understanding of plastic integration. Rather than developing a mosaic which was highly integrated with the surrounding environment and architecture, O'Gorman structure the architecture, sculpture and mosaic of the Central Library to function as a single unit in which plastic integration is only achieved when all the parts are viewed as a whole. O'Gorman's multi-media design is, to an extent, a more complete integration than the imposition of mosaics on other structures throughout CU.

The Central Library is composed of a ten-story tower placed upon a wide two-story base. The base, composed almost entirely of glass, is highly modern in appearance. The tower, nearly void of windows, lacks decorative architectural features which strongly unites it to the careful conservation of materials of the architect's earlier schools. The exterior of the lower window-covered floors of the library is quite modern in appearance. While the exterior of the windowless section of the tower has a more heavy and boxy when it is conceptualized without the mosaic which encompasses its surface, it still has a modern appearance. The open reading room and office building like the interior of the library reflect the functionalist style more than organic architecture. O'Gorman and the other architects attempted to make the best and most economic use of the space without unusual or organic elements the interior plan. The pedregal stone wall, decorated with relief carvings inspired by pre-Columbian art located outside of the library echoes the

stone of the tower.²⁸ It is this wall and the relief carvings which decorate it which have the most significant link to O’Gorman’s concept of organic architecture. Not only is the stone of the wall, the same stone naturally found around the campus, its decorative, pre-Columbian inspired relief sculptures unite the wall with Mexican history and pre-Columbian mythology. Through the development of the *Historical Representation of Culture* O’Gorman linked the functional architecture of the Central Library with the pedregal stone wall and his concept of organic architecture.

The Central Library is located to the north of the Rectory Tower. In the 1950s students walked passed the Rectory Tower to reach the Central Library. The result in the *Historical Representation of Culture* always being viewed immediately after *The People of the University, the University for the People*. This relationship highlights the stark differences between the two works in overall composition and dimensional quality. It also provided students with both a representation of Mexican culture being cultivated by the choices of students and the people of today and a representation of Mexican culture as resulting from pre-Columbian mythology and Mexican history. The combination of the two works emphasized the importance of both aspects of Mexican society. Today students enter the University at la Avenida de Los Insurgentes del Sur and no longer encounter *The People of the University, the University for the People* prior to the *Historical Representation of Culture*. This has isolated O’Gorman’s historical concept of Mexican culture from Siqueiros’s social understanding.

While the lack of windows makes the library appear heavy it also provided O’Gorman with a massive 4400-yard area to tell the story of the history of Mexico.

²⁸ Pedregal stone is black lava rock and is native to the region of Mexico in which CU is located.

Known as the *Historical Representation of Culture*, O’Gorman’s mosaic, covers all four walls of the library’s tower composed entirely of colored rocks and blue glass native to Mexico. O’Gorman explained during an interview in 1978 that he chose to develop this “spectacular covering” of colored stones for the mosaic because he believed that a material such as marble would have had the monstrous appearance of a coffin.²⁹ However, his choice of a brightly colored material native to Mexico also reflects the ideologies behind his concept of an organic Mexican architecture and allowed him to develop a work more obviously influenced by pre-Columbian artifacts.

The artist divided the *Historical Representation of Culture* into three parts: the pre-Hispanic period depicted on the northern wall, the Spanish colonial period depicted on the southern wall, and the modern era depicted on the smaller eastern and western walls. The structure of the panels reflects O’Gorman’s interest in pre-Columbian codices. When asked what visual effect he wanted to develop within the composition of the *Historical Representation of Culture*, O’Gorman explained that he sought a “symbolic” representation of Mexican culture in the form of a modern codex.³⁰ He states that “el efecto general que dan los mosaicos de la CU es el de un código, un código que se despliega sobre las paredes de un edificio.”³¹ “The general effect of CU’s mosaic is that of a codex which unfolds over the walls of a building.” O’Gorman described the layout of this codex as a large frieze. Each section of the mosaic features multiple images. Although each image has an individual meaning, the story relayed through reading them

²⁹ Juan O’Gorman, *La Palabra de Juan O’Gorman: Selección de Textos* (México : Coordinación de Extensión Universitaria, Dirección General de Difusión Cultural, Unidad Editorial/UNAM, Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 1983), 295-296.

³⁰ O’Gorman, *La Palabra de Juan O’Gorman*, 296.

³¹ O’Gorman, *La Palabra de Juan O’Gorman*, 296.

as a singular panel produces the most important effect. The images of each panel may at first appear chaotic, they are structured in a specific way. When reading the northern wall one should begin at the top of the central axis and work his/her way down before moving to the right and left columns which should be read together section by section. The images featured along the central axis are the most important. The images featured at the top of each column demand more attention than the images featured below them. This most important of all is the top central image.

The top image of the northern wall's central panel is that of the sun, the "most ancient" Aztec symbol for the formation of matter and the source of life. Directly below the sun, O'Gorman depicted white and black, day and night, and the Aztec astronomical system. The observer next sees the emblem of Mexico followed by the Mexican Eagle, which O'Gorman described as representative of Tenochtitlan. The images in each section of the right and left columns represent dualities according to O'Gorman. The highest images in each of these columns depict important Aztec deities. Those on the right are the maleficent Tezcatlipoca and Chalchihuitlicue, and those on the left are the beneficent Quetzalcoatl and Tlaloc. The figures parallel to the Eagle represent the concept of time. The two figures to the right represent the contradiction between the present and the future and the image to the left represents eternity and stability. The lowest section of each of these columns depicts the Aztec people. The individuals represented on the right are warriors and chiefs. Those represented on the left are farmers and craftsmen.

O'Gorman's representation of the Spanish colonial period on the southern wall is similarly structured. This work depicts the concept of good and evil imposed by the

Spanish colonials. The central column features images representative of Spanish authority. The highest image in this column, that of the Bible, is centered between two indigenous figures. The Bible, large in size, appears to be in the foreground, while the smaller indigenous figures appear to be on a further plane. The effect is that the Bible, a Spanish religious object, appears to be covering indigenous practices. The double-headed Habsburg eagle follows the Bible. Other images in the central column include a temple composed of classical Greek and Roman architecture, an angel and a Catholic Cathedral. O’Gorman depicts the hands of Jesus, distinguishable by the stigmata, to either side of the Cathedral,. The right and left columns again feature dualities. The most prominent of these compares European astronomical symbols, to the right, with those of the Aztecs, to the left. The bottom of each of these columns features representations of “the Spanish colonial world at war.”

The eastern and western walls, which represent the modern era follow the same pattern as the northern and southern walls. The images depicted on the western wall “are emblems of libraries and universities.” The duality featured on this wall is that between European influences, on the left, and Mexican-Indian influences, on the right. The most important image on the Eastern wall is “the reborn Cuauhtemoc, represented as an atom, a symbol of the authentic Mexican nationality based on its ancient tradition.” The sun and moon are represented to the left and right of him respectively. The fire depicted along the central axis symbolizes “the passion and the struggle, over which are seen the fruits of effort and work.”

The stylistic choices which O’Gorman made when designing the Central Library and the mosaic, which covers its exterior combine pre-Columbian influences with

modern architecture. The strong connection of the mosaic's codex format to the tower and of the pedregal stone wall to pre-Columbian imagery and the environment arguably integrates the architecture with Mexican identity and strengthens its legitimacy within CU. However, not everyone viewed O'Gorman's design in this light. Siqueiros believed that O'Gorman's insistence on developing a structure covered in Mexican imagery and materials did not make a work of Mexican architecture but rather created nothing more than the equivalent of an American tourist in "Mexican kilts and skirts."³² This claim rests in Siqueiros' belief that the present and the future define Mexican society rather than the past. Interestingly O'Gorman's architectural choices were limited by Lazo despite the artistic and architectural freedoms of the project. Lazo denied his original design, which featured a pyramidal composition.³³ This previous design may have been a more successful integration of the modern Mexican architecture and pre-Columbian influences important to O'Gorman. Further, O'Gorman was limited in his ability to develop an architectural plan which consisted of modern and open architecture due to the University's mandate that the library has controlled rather than open collections.³⁴

³² Siqueiros, "Precepts," 208.

³³ Nixon Cooke. "A Return to the Earth," 59.

³⁴ Antonio Luna Arroyo, *Juan O'Gorman: autobiografía, antología, juicios críticos y documentación exhaustiva sobre su obra* (Mexico City: Cuadernos Populares de Pintura Mexicana Moderna, 1973), 154.

PLASTIC INTEGRATION

Like Siqueiros and Rivera, O’Gorman was of the belief that plastic integration was important to the art and architecture of Mexico during the twentieth-century.

O’Gorman believed that plastic integration had existed throughout history as an important aspect of architecture. In an essay published in *Espacios*, O’Gorman stated that historically paintings and sculptures were developed specifically with the architecture of a building in mind and architecture was developed with a plan for specific styles of painting and sculpture.³⁵ O’Gorman argued that the advent of the specialization labor and the resultant mass production of pieces meant to adorn any architecture that plastic integration was lost.³⁶ O’Gorman believed that the Mexican mural movement provided an opportunity for Mexico to return to plastic integration.

As has been briefly discussed, O’Gorman, as both an artist and an architect, seized a unique opportunity to develop a work of plastic integration, when he, along with Gustavo Saavedra and Juan Martínez was commissioned by Carlos Lazo to design the Central Library for CU. While the other artists commissioned to create works for the campus were not asked to consult with the architects of the buildings they were to decorate, O’Gorman ranked as one of the lead architects of the Central Library. This meant that, unlike the other artists, O’Gorman was not limited by the need to develop a

³⁵ O’Gorman, *La palabra de Juan O’Gorman*, 58-65.

³⁶ O’Gorman, *La palabra de Juan O’Gorman*, 58-65.

work that appeared to be a continuation of existing architecture but could instead develop the two alongside one another in the truest nature of plastic integration.

O’Gorman did not choose to integrate the *Historical Representation of Culture* with the architecture of the Central Library as Siqueiros or Rivera did. Rather than focusing heavily on sculptural relief elements which would stand out from a distance, he developed a massive composition which engulfed the entirety of the Central Library in a manner analogous to a tapestry. While Siqueiros argued that sculptural elements were necessary to develop a “multiangular composition” which could be viewed from extreme angles, O’Gorman included so many images that the inclusion of sculptural elements were relegated to the pedregal wall in front of the Central Library. The two-dimensional quality of O’Gorman’s mosaic is what prevents the work from being composed of too much visual information and is partially responsible for the tapestry-like appearance of the work. While some of the visual elements within the composition are developed with a slight illusion to depth, the sheer amount of imagery and O’Gorman’s choice to develop a continuous narrative on a single plane limits this illusion. The Central Library’s tower’s lack of windows further develops the tapestry-like appearance of O’Gorman’s mosaic. While the tapestry-like appearance of O’Gorman’s mosaic would not integrate well with buildings composed of a more organic architecture, such as the Olympic Stadium, there is something to be said about the visual communication between the windowless tower of the Central Library, composed of heavy, flat walls, and the mosaics two-dimensionality.

O’Gorman’s choice not to include sculpture in the *Historical Representation of Culture* is interesting when viewed in the context of plastic integration. A lack of

sculpture contradicts plastic integration's official discourse, which calls for a combination of painting, architecture, and sculpture, which combine to create a single work. O'Gorman himself lists sculpture as an important aspect of plastic integration in his discussion of the movement.³⁷ Despite being a significant step away from the official discourse, O'Gorman's decision actually increases the integration between the *Historical Representation of Culture* and the Central Library. As mentioned above the two-dimensional quality of the work provides it with a tapestry like aesthetic. Significantly, this aesthetic implies a strong and permanent connection between the library's façade and the mosaic with which it is adorned. In comparison, the sculptural painting which Siqueiros developed for his work has the opposite effect. The figures of *The People of the University, the University for the People*, which are developed in relief, are disconnected from the Rectory Tower. Their three-dimensional quality distances them from the building's architecture. There is a minute allusion to their potential leap from the composition and participation in the conversation between the mosaic and the architecture of the Rectory Tower.

O'Gorman's choice to separate sculpture from the *Historical Representation of Culture* likely resulted from his participation as an architect of the Central Library. Rather than needing to rely on the mosaic to develop plastic integration as the other artists did, O'Gorman was able to develop the entirety of the Central Library as a work of plastic integration. The sculptural element of the Central Library which ties the entirety of the building's architecture and mosaic together is the lava rock wall decorated with pre-Columbian motifs at the front of the library's base.

³⁷ O'Gorman, La palabra de Juan O'Gorman, 58-65.

CONCEPTUAL INTEGRATION

Despite Siqueiros's argument that the *Historical Representation of Culture* offered nothing more than a failed attempt to Mexicanize the architecture of the Central Library and his disapproval of O'Gorman's theme, a high level of conceptual integration exists between the mosaic and the purpose of the building that it adorns.³⁸ As previously discussed, O'Gorman's concept for the *Historical Representation of Culture* was a symbolic interpretation of Mexican history meant to represent the national identity. Inspired by pre-Columbian codices, he designed the work to have a similar appearance. This is significant as the codex is ancient book form and as a result, the combination of O'Gorman's choice of theme and design offer an external representation of the collections housed within the library. They are meant to be read in a similar manner. No building on the campus provides such a detailed representation of Mexican history in a literary form. Through designing the mosaic as a codex O'Gorman made the library, which houses the universities books and documentation of Mexican history into a book which documents a symbolic version of Mexican history. The conceptual relationship between the mosaic and the library strengthen the overall level of integration within the various elements of the Central Library.

³⁸ Siqueiros, "Precepts," 208.

In 1949 O’Gorman was commissioned as one of the architects for CU’s Central Library. Despite being previously successful in designing schools with functionalist architecture, O’Gorman chose to develop the Central Library by combining functionalism with his new concept of organic architecture. With this goal in mind, O’Gorman, Gustavo Saavedra, and Juan Martínez developed a design for the library that would function as the canvas for the *Historical Representation of Culture* and echoed the natural rocks present on the campus. Through the development of the *Historical Representation of Culture*, the library’s architecture, and the sculptural relief on the lava rock wall outside of the library, O’Gorman skillfully developed a work of organic architecture that symbolically represented his interpretation of Mexican identity. The opportunity to work as both an artist and architect, which was denied to the other artists, provided O’Gorman with the opportunity to develop the only work of plastic integration on the campus and strengthened the success of the Central Library.

Figure 6. Juan O'Gorman: *The Historical Representation of Culture*. Mosaic, 1956.

Front, Central Library, CU, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 7. Juan O'Gorman: *The Historical Representation of Culture*. Mosaic, 1956.

Back, Central Library, CU, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 8. Juan O’Gorman: *The Historical Representation of Culture*. Mosaic, 1956.

Western Wall, Central Library, CU, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 9. Juan O’Gorman: *The Historical Representation of Culture*. Mosaic, 1956.

Eastern Wall, Central Library, CU, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 10. Juan O’Gorman: Pedregal Rock Wall. 1956. Central Library, CU, Mexico
City, Mexico.

Figure 11. Juan O'Gorman: *Diego Rivera Studio and House*. Sketch: 1929-1931. Diego Rivera 2, Alta Vista Corner. Colonia San Angel Inn. Alvaro Obregon, Mexico.

Figure 12. Juan O'Gorman: *Frida Kahlo House*. Sketch, 1929-1931. Diego Rivera 2, Alta Vista Corner. Colonia San Angel Inn. Alvaro Obregon, Mexico.

Figure 13. Juan O’Gorman: Escuela Primaria de San Simón. 1932. Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 14. Juan O’Gorman: Escuela Primaria de San Simón. 1932. Mexico City, Mexico.

CHAPTER III

DIEGO RIVERA

Unlike Siqueiros, Diego Rivera displayed less enthusiasm about the concept or development of CU, likely a result of the project's opposition to Rivera's own ideologies and beliefs. The most obvious conflict between Rivera's beliefs and the development of CU is the predominant choice of the project's architects who set out to develop buildings influenced by Le Corbusier and the International Style.³⁹ Rivera believed that art and architecture must be rooted in the artist or architects native culture and style. He argues in his autobiography *Diego Rivera: My Art, My Life* that "the more native art is, the more it belongs to the entire world because taste is rooted in nature."⁴⁰

While his separation from the architectural development of CU meant that Rivera's opposition to the use of International Style, which uses global architectural features, went unheard, it did not prevent him from accepting a commission to develop a mosaic for the campus. In 1951 he began to develop a mosaic meant to cover the exterior of the Olympic Stadium. Rivera's acceptance of this commission is unsurprising as the architecture of the Olympic Stadium is not inspired by International Style but rather echoes the surrounding environment. The stadium is sunk several meters into the ground

³⁹Siqueiros, "Precepts," 208.

⁴⁰ Diego Rivera, "Art Student in Paris" in *Diego Rivera: My Art, My Life* (New York: The Citadel Press, 1960), 61.

and mimics the appearance of a natural land mass. The stadium's strong connection to the environment symbolizes of a strong connection to Mexican culture and Mexico's pre-Columbian roots. The mosaic that Rivera designed, *The University, the Mexican Family, Peace and Youth Sports (The University)*, plays on this connection and highlights the importance pre-Columbian mythology and imagery to modern Mexican culture. Sadly, likely as a result of Rivera's poor health, the death of Frida Kahlo, and the project's budgetary constraints, he never completed the mosaic.

DIVISION

David Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, Juan O’Gorman and José Chávez Morado and the original exterior mosaics they created for CU in the 1950s, are largely broken down into two groups by the artists themselves and scholars. The division places the works of Rivera, O’Gorman, and Chávez Morado together and locates the works of Siqueiros in a group of their own. This division has two key components. First, the artists chose to work in different mediums. While each of the artists developed mosaics for CU and Rivera and O’Gorman included sculptural relief in their overall program, only Siqueiros’s work was composed of “sculpted painting.”⁴¹ And only Siqueiros emphasized the sculptural elements of his work as one of the most important aspects of the work without which plastic integration was impossible. Had Rivera’s mosaic for CU been completed it would have acted as a visual intermediary between the two groups in respect to medium but not an ideological one. Rivera’s inclusion of sculpture was developed only in response to the architecture of the Olympic Stadium. Further, Siqueiros would likely argue that Rivera’s use of low relief fails to change dynamically as the viewer moves around the work as it is not the flat surface he so ardently argued against. The inclusion of sculpture or “sculpted painting,” may appear to be minor but was actually a point of

⁴¹ Desmond Rochfort, “Siqueiros 1940-1971: The Ideology of Invention,” in *Mexican Muralism* (New York: Universe Publishing, 1993), 205-206.

In his book *Mexican Muralism*, Desmond Rochfort explains that Siqueiros defined sculpted painting as “the use of diverse protruding planes of more than thirty centimeters in height, which had an exclusively optical or textural intention.”

conflict between the two groups.

The second component of this division is the artists' approaches to representing and defining Mexicanness. Rivera, O'Gorman, and Chávez Morado's overall compositions situated the roots of modern Mexican culture in its pre-Columbian past. Siqueiros chose to represent modern Mexican culture through the actions and continued the struggle of the Mexican people in the mid-twentieth-century with only a nod in the direction of the importance of past events. Despite these differences, the distinction between these two groups is not as clear as it appears on the surface. As noted by Siqueiros, the political ideologies of all of these artists were fundamentally the same.⁴² Further, as Mexican artists, each rooted their compositions in their Mexican identity. The division is also difficult because each of the artists had their own unique understanding of plastic integration and, as will be seen throughout the following chapters, each developed a mosaic for CU which closely reflected their individual experiences and beliefs.

"There are great differences of opinion regarding realist art forms, between myself and the Rivera-O'Gorman-Chávez Morado group; we use different technical processes in our search for realism; but we have no fundamental political differences, we are both fighting for political realism."⁴³

-David Alfaro Siqueiros

⁴² Rochfort, in *Mexican Muralism*, 205-206.

⁴³ Siqueiros, "Precepts," 209.

ENVIRONMENTAL PLASTIC INTEGRATION IN EARLIER WORKS

Rivera's work reflects a concept of plastic integration far different from that developed by Siqueiros. Siqueiros worked to develop exterior compositions which unified the architectural features of a building, a mosaic, or mural and sculptural elements. Rivera set out to develop compositions that unified a building's architectural features, including sculptural and painted or mosaicked elements with the surrounding environment. Siqueiros's concept of plastic integration sought to catch the attention of those who pass by the work from a distance at great speed. The works he developed represent a modern Mexico, not dependent on its historical roots but rather focused on progress. Rivera's concept of plastic integration resulted in works with a primordial connection to Mexico. The works he developed emphasize the importance of Mexican history and mythology on the development of modern Mexican culture and society.

Unlike Siqueiros, Rivera has already developed a work of plastic integration before accepting a commission for CU. Rivera's first work of plastic integration was completed in 1951 immediately before he began work on *The University*. The mural and mosaic program which Rivera designed for the Cárcamo del Río Lerma is strongly integrated with the environment and represents the earliest stages of an exploration of plastic integration. The Cárcamo del Río Lerma is a water distribution system with an open cistern and water basin. The theme of Rivera's program at this site "is the legacy of

water to the human race.”⁴⁴ As he would later to of his original conception for *The University*, Rivera designed the Lerma waterworks program as a timeline. The program begins with water as the origin of life and follows the story of mankind’s evolution. Rivera places a special emphasis on the Aztec gods which were associated with water and the modern Mexican’s who designed and built Cárcamo del Río Lerma. Rivera designed two works for this program. The first is a now almost completely destroyed mural, *Water the Source of Life*, which covered the entirety of the open cistern. The second is a mosaic earth sculpture which rises from the exterior water basin.

The design of the open cistern, when still visible, was read from the center of the cistern’s floor and up the walls. The mural began with the origin of life, which Rivera represented as Chalchiuhtlique, the Aztec goddess of water, who was represented with a child.⁴⁵ The goddess, surrounded by the representation of flowing water and small forms of primitive aquatic organisms, reveals the beginning of life.⁴⁶ Shifting up the walls of the cistern Rivera represented more advanced forms of life.⁴⁷ Two human figures representing the African and Asian races respectively remain visible on the walls today. A representation of the water to which these figures owe their lives surrounds them. Additionally, Rivera dedicated a third wall of the cistern to representing the portraits of the engineers, directors, planners, and workers who developed the Cárcamo del Río Lerma.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Stanton L Catlin, “Cárcamo del Río Lerma” in “Mural Census” in *Diego Rivera*, ed. Cynthia Newman Helms (Founder’s Society Detroit Institute of Art; New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1987), 325.

⁴⁵ Betty Ann Brown, “The Past Idealized: Diego Rivera’s Use of Pre-Columbian Imagery,” in *Diego Rivera: a Retrospective* (New York: Founders Society, Detroit Institute of Arts, in association with W.W. Norton, 1998), 141.

⁴⁶ Catlin, “Cárcamo del Río Lerma,” 325.

⁴⁷ Catlin, “Cárcamo del Río Lerma,” 325.

⁴⁸ Catlin, “Cárcamo del Río Lerma,” 325.

The mosaic earth sculpture of the exterior water basin, far less complex than the mural reveals the strongest connection with Rivera's design for the Olympic Stadium. It represents the rain god Tlaloc in the typical running position of pre-Columbian depictions.⁴⁹ As the mosaic is quite large and may only be viewed from ground level, the representation of Tlaloc is subject to foreshortening. As a result, Stanton L. Catlin argues that "one may presume that the sculpture was conceived metaphorically as a symbolic intermediary between man and the supernatural forces of the sky."⁵⁰ When designing the mosaic earth structure for Cárcamo del Río Lerma, Rivera made use of several of the same aesthetic choices he would later apply to *The University*. First, Rivera chose to construct the mosaic using natural, earth-colored stones, with the exception of Tlaloc's eyes which are composed of turquoise stones. The decision has a similar effect here to that of the Olympic Stadium: it more fully integrates the mosaic with its surroundings. The second aesthetic choice was Rivera's decision to represent Tlaloc as an earth sculpture. This echoes Rivera's later choice of designing *The University* in low relief. According to Catlin, the figure has been criticized as "low relief flopped on its back." Third, Rivera's representation of Tlaloc is composed in the same organic style he would later apply to *The University*. According to Rivera's own description of the work "[he] was so pleased with this combination of painting and sculpture that [he] used the technique again in [his] decorations for the stadium in University City."⁵¹

⁴⁹ Brown, "The Past Idealized," 142.

⁵⁰ Catlin, "Cárcamo del Río Lerma," 326-327.

⁵¹ Diego Rivera, "Underwater," in *Diego Rivera: My Art, My Life*, ed. Gladys March (New York: The Citadel Press, 1960), 267.

OLYMPIC STADIUM MOSAIC

As previously discussed the architecture of the Olympic Stadium was highly integrated with the surrounding environment and Rivera's beliefs and ideologies. What is significant about this architecture in reference to the work of Diego Rivera is that it is both integrated with the surrounding environment and pre-Columbian mythology. The stadium, designed by August Pérez Palacios, Raul Salinas Moro, and Jorge Bravo Jiménez, offers an architecture far different from that of the stadiums typically found within the United States. Rather than creating a structure in which rows of seating rose high into the air, the architects chose to design a structure in which the track and playing field sink several meters below ground level. As a result of this design the stadium is connected to its overall environment and has a symbolic connection to Mexican history and mythology. The volcanic appearance of the stadium further strengthens this connection. René Davids, the professor of architecture and urban design at the University of California, Berkeley, describes the stadium as having "emerged as a reincarnated volcano" and "recall[ing] the numerous pre-Columbian pyramids" with "an imposing artificial topography: part landscape, part built monument."⁵² The structure's volcanic appearance "references [the] pre-Columbian myths associated with" these natural structures and exists as a symbol of twentieth-

⁵² René Davids, "Mythical Terrain and the Building of Mexico's UNAM," in "Working Papers" no. 23 (2008): 6.

century Mexican culture.⁵³ This connection parallels the majority of Rivera's works of the period, including his original design for *The University*, which root modern Mexican civilization in pre-Columbian culture.

In 1951 Diego Rivera began to develop the design for the relief mosaic *The University*, for University City's Olympic Stadium. He originally conceptualized to present a timeline of the development of sport from the pre-Columbian period and ending in the modern era. The drafts of the mosaic include depictions of Aztecs playing Ullamalitzli, a ritual Aztec ball game, on a tlachtli ball court and modern Mexicans playing basketball and football and running track. The only completed section of the mosaic is a composite Rivera's commission, like that of Siqueiros, closely reflected his own artistic preferences. He designed the stadium, unlike the majority of the buildings developed for CU, to become part of the environment. Despite the close relationship between the commission and Rivera's style and ideology, Rivera did not complete the mosaic. The section of the mosaic Rivera completed directly corresponds to the title of the work: *The University, the Mexican Family, Peace and Youth Sports*. At the center of the mosaic, he represented the university shield, the condor and the eagle on a cactus. The Mexican family is represented by three figures, a father, a mother, and a child, who has been placed directly above the university shield. To the far left and right of the mosaic, a male and female athlete, respectively, light the Olympic flame. The entirety of the bottom of the mosaic is framed by the representation of the Aztec god Quetzalcoatl.

Clearly, had the entirety of the mosaic been developed he would have achieved integration with not only the Olympic Stadium but also the surrounding environment.

⁵³ Davids, "Mythical Terrain," 6.

The success which the mosaic would have achieved would have reflected three aesthetic choices. First, Rivera chose to construct the mosaic using natural, earth-colored stones which reflected the volcanic appearance of the stadium. Had he chosen to construct the mosaic using bright stones or paint, the work would not read as a continuation of the stadium's architecture, but an afterthought. Rivera's second aesthetic choice was to represent the entire mosaic in relief. This decision was important due to the fact that the walls which he was commissioned to decorate were inset in a manner reminiscent of a frieze. By designing the mosaic in relief, Rivera was able to echo both the concrete lip which runs around the top of the stadium wall and the many entrances which jut out from its curved surface. This choice is also important in terms of plastic integration because it brings the sculptural element into the work. Finally, Rivera chose to create the mosaic using organic forms which mimicked the volcanic appearance of the stadium. Arguably, the mosaic that Rivera designed for the stadium integrated with the overall architecture of the building better than the flat volcanic rock that it was meant to cover.

As in the case of Siqueiros mosaic, strong connection exists between the purpose of the Olympic Stadium and the imagery which Rivera chose to develop. Rivera did not complete the panels for the work which literally depicted the sports which would be played within the stadium or those which had influenced these modern sports. However, the central panel's inclusion of two athletes lighting the Olympic flame not only connects the panel's imagery to the sports function of the stadium but also highlights the importance of sports to the university and the Mexican family. Rivera's imagery therefore directly reflects the reasons that the Olympic Stadium is important not only to CU but also to the Mexican people.

LOCATION

Unlike Siqueiros's mosaic which was located on the Rectory Tower and positioned directly across from the campus bus stop in the 1950s, Rivera's mosaic and the Olympic Stadium are located across la Avenida de Los Insurgentes del Sur, along with CU's other sports facilities. The Olympic Stadium and CU's other sports facilities are connected to the rest of campus by a tunnel and easily accessible. However accessible this separate location is, students must still make the choice to visit this part of campus and know that the buildings in this location are associated with sports rather than academics. As a result of this location, Rivera, unlike Siqueiros, did not need to develop a work which welcomed students to the university or shared CU's mission with those visiting the campus. Instead, the location of Rivera's mosaic was meant to relay the importance of sports to the university and the Mexican people as a whole. The relocation of the student drop off to la Avenida de Los Insurgentes del Sur means that students today are dropped off closer to the Olympic Stadium and Rivera's mosaic but does not affect the purpose of the mosaic in any way.

Despite being ideologically opposed to the decision of CU's architects to develop the majority of the campuses architecture in International Style, in 1951 Diego Rivera still accepted a commission to develop a mosaic for CU. The mosaic, *The University, the Mexican Family, Peace and Youth Sports*, was originally conceived to surround the exterior of the Olympic Stadium, however, only the central panel was ever completed. The medium which Rivera chose to use for the work, stone mosaic in relief, was

influenced by the mosaic sculpture of Tlaloc he developed for the Cárcamo del Río Lerma. Both of the works were designed to harmonize with and reflect the Mexican environment. While each of the artists commissioned to develop a work for CU valued plastic integration, Rivera was the only artist who viewed it as combining the plastic arts into a unified composition which was also strongly connected to its surrounding environment. Rivera's understanding of plastic integration pushes past the visual cues and social interactions important to the other artist's concepts to develop a symbolic integration which combines his mosaic with the Olympic Stadium's architecture, the surrounding environment, Mexican history and pre-Columbian mythology. The work was originally conceived to emphasize the importance of sports to the Mexican family and the university, as well as highlight the important historical significance of sports in the country.

Figure 15. The Olympic Stadium, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 16. Diego Rivera: *The University, the Mexican Family, Peace and Youth Sports.*

Mosaic, 1951. The Olympic Stadium, CU, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 17. Diego Rivera: *Water the Source of Life*. Underwater Mural, 1951. Cárcamo del Río Lerma, Chapultepec Park, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 18. Diego Rivera: *Water the Source of Life*. Underwater Mural, 1951. Cárcamo del Río Lerma, Chapultepec Park, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 19. Diego Rivera: *Tlaloc*. Stone Mosaic, 1951. Cárcamo del Río Lerma, Chapultepec Park, Mexico City, Mexico.

CHAPTER IV

JOSE CHAVEZ MORADO

José Chávez Morado supported the possibilities of CU with a different primary motive than the other artists who developed works for the project. Like Siqueiros, he believed that unitary art, in which artists, architects, engineers, and builders worked together to develop works which truly represented modern Mexican society was an important next step. However, Chávez Morado's goal was to develop public interest in national places and things, rather than to further the Mexican mural movement itself. He believed that plastic integration would result in national integration. The architects in charge of the project refused to foster plastic integration when they chose not to include the artists in the development of the campus. The choice to separate the artists from the project's architectural development not only meant that the artists were required to develop works which matched the existent architecture but also that the artists, architects, engineers, and builders were not working together. Despite his separation from architectural development, in 1952, Chávez Morado developed two mosaics for CU, *The Return of Quetzalcoatl* and *The Conquest of Energy*, which is highly integrated with the architecture of the building they adorn. While Siqueiros argued that the separation of the project's artists from CU's architectural development hindered the artists' ability to develop fully integrated works, Chávez Morado's goal of working together to develop national destinations was not negatively affected in the same way. He developed two

mosaics as a continuation of the architecture and in doing so worked indirectly with the architects, engineers, and builders to develop works which attract tourists.

CU MOSAICS

The Return of Quetzalcoatl is a representation of the pre-Columbian myth of Quetzalcoatl, the god of wind and learning. According to José de Santiago Silva, author of *José Chávez Morado: Vida, Obra y Circunstancias*, the mosaic references Quetzalcoatl's identification with Ceacatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl, a late fourteenth century ruler of Tula sent into exile upon being defeated.⁵⁴ Before Ceacatl Topiltzin Quetzalcoatl left, he warned that he would return to Tula to retake the throne.⁵⁵ Santiago Silva implies that it is this general threat that the myth of Quetzalcoatl's return and therefore Chávez Morado's mosaic is based upon. Santiago Silva succinctly describes Chávez Morado's treatment of the myth of Quetzalcoatl "como la admonición de un ecumenismo que transpondrá los linderos del localismo para invocar el concierto universal de las culturas del planeta, un una convivencia que habrá de trascender las barreras étnicas, políticas y confesionales."⁵⁶ This transcendence of ethnic, political and confessional barriers on a global scale is represented through the depiction of seven characters representing various global cultures riding in a boat composed of the Serpiente Preciosa form of Quetzalcoatl.⁵⁷ The first figure, when reading from left to right, depicts

⁵⁴ José de Santiago Silva, "Consideraciones en Torno a la Producción Monumental de José Chávez Morado," in *José Chávez Morado: Vida, Obra y Circunstancias*, 2nd ed. (Mexico: Ediciones la Rana, 2001), 85.

⁵⁵ Santiago Silva, "Consideraciones," 85.

⁵⁶ Santiago Silva, "Consideraciones," 85.

⁵⁷ The term Serpiente Preciosa refers to the traditional representation of Quetzalcoatl as a green feathered serpent within pre-Columbian iconography.

historical Egypt through the traditional iconographic representation of Egyptian pharaohs. Directly in front of the pharaoh is the embodiment of Christianity in the form of a Franciscan monk. In front of the Franciscan and slightly to his left is a nude figure with red skin who represents pre-Columbian society. The figure wears the mask of Ehecatl, a pre-Columbian wind god often described as a form of Quetzalcoatl.⁵⁸ This relationship is important because the figure's right arm is raised towards the east, the direction from which Quetzalcoatl would return.⁵⁹ To the figures right is the iconographic representation of a ruler of the Achaemenid Empire which hales from Mesopotamia.⁶⁰ To his right is the representation of classical culture depicted as a Greek in traditional clothing. The figure to the right of the embodiment of classical culture is a Buddhist monk who represents the cultures of Eastern Asia. The final figure, to his left, is a figure dressed in traditional Middle Eastern clothing who represents Islamic culture.⁶¹ The background of the composition is almost entirely composed of flames. The upper left-hand section contains a pre-Columbian pyramid which has survived an attack. When taken in its entirety the composition is meant to reflect the various cultural influences that led to the development of modern Mexican society.⁶²

The Conquest of Energy is a representation of the development of humanity from the dark, which represents ignorance, to the light, which represents knowledge and technology. Chávez Morado represents "the conquest of energy" or development of knowledge and technology as the possession of the knowledge of creating fire.⁶³ When

⁵⁸ Santiago Silva, "Consideraciones," 85.

⁵⁹ Santiago Silva, "Consideraciones," 85.

⁶⁰ Santiago Silva, "Consideraciones," 85.

⁶¹ Santiago Silva, "Consideraciones," 85.

⁶² Alma M. Reed, "José Chávez Morado," in *The Mexican Muralists*, (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc.), 156.

⁶³ Santiago Silva, "Consideraciones," 85-86.

reading from left to right the overall composition of the mosaic progresses from pre-history to the modern era. To the extreme left of the composition Chávez Morado represents fear through the depiction of huddled indigenous peoples, a cloaked skeleton and a lunging jaguar in the dark of the night. In the center of the composition, he represents the freedom from fear humanity gained through the development of basic technology such as fire. To the right, of the composition he represents the dangerous turn which technology has taken in the modern era through the depiction of an exploding bomb which knocks down the people in its vicinity.

PLASTIC INTEGRATION

The Return of Quetzalcoatl and *The Conquest of Energy*, highly successful works of plastic integration, owe their success to Chávez Morado's overall compositional choices, including his use of form and content. The forms that Chávez Morado chose to use when developing the compositions of these two mosaics reflected the same forms used to develop the architecture of the buildings they were designed to decorate. *The Return of Quetzalcoatl* is located at the end of the lower section of the original science tower at CU. This section of the building has a sloped roof which reflects in the cement slab upon which Chávez Morado composed the work. The sloped creates roof a crisp diagonal line which calls the viewer's attention to the building's architecture and repeats through the lines created by the outstretched right arms of the Greek and Muslim figures. This line also repeats in the outstretched arm of the pre-Columbian figure and position of Quetzalcoatl's body which raises slightly toward the bow of the boat. The opposite direction of the line created by these last two figures from that of the roof increases the dynamism of the composition. The composition of *the Conquest of Energy* makes use of the same relationship to form. *The Conquest of Energy* is located on the upper portion of the convex wall of the auditorium, which is also a part of the original science tower of CU. The strongest architectural form of this section of the building is the arch or curved line which exists both in the shape of the convex wall and the decorative arches located above the mosaic. As in the composition of *the Return of Quetzalcoatl*, Chávez Morado

chose to echo these strong lines within his mosaic. Curved or arching lines are repeated throughout the work in the form of tree limbs, the skeleton's ribs and cloak, the leap of the jaguar, the blaze of the fire, and the bodies of several of the human figures. The same cannot be said about the mosaic O'Gorman designed for the central library or the mural Siqueiros composed for the rectory building. While O'Gorman had the most control over the architecture of the building which he was decorating there is no strong correlation between the straight and heavy lines he used to create the central library and the composition of his mosaic. Siqueiros's design is composed of strong lines but it is only the single arm composed for the northern panel which directly repeats the predominantly straight lines of the rectory building. While the relationship is present, the straight lines of the building's architecture do not stand out in the same way as the diagonal and curved lines Chávez Morado was reacting to. As a result, the dialogue is not noticed as strongly within Siqueiros's design. The composition of Rivera's mosaic does echo the curved lines of the Olympic Stadium for which it was designed.

A strong connection exists between the content or theme of Chávez Morado's CU works and their architectural environments. When designing the mosaic *the Conquest of Energy* he created a work which strongly interacted with the purpose of the faculty science building which it decorates. As described above the mosaic is an allegorical composition which depicts humanities increased knowledge in the form of scientific and technological progress through the use of light and dark. Light in the form of fire symbolizes knowledge and darkness in the form of the night symbolizes fear and ignorance. Chávez Morado also makes a point of emphasizing that at the far end of the spectrum knowledge has the potential to cause fear and destruction or improve the lives

of the people. The allegory of *the Conquest of Energy* has a strong correlation with the purpose of a university in general and the socialist ideologies of the majority of the artists who worked on the campus. The mosaic, therefore, would form a strong connection to any building within CU. However, Chávez Morado's choice to focus on the increase of knowledge through science and technology forms an inseparable bond between the purpose of the mosaic and the purpose of the building it decorates. Each is an exploration of science and the direction where science will take us. While the purpose of the building does not visually increase the plastic integration of the mosaic, it does in an intellectual way. Viewers who know the purpose of the building are able to perceive this connection.

The content or theme of *the Return of Quetzalcoatl* has a completely different sort of relationship with its architectural environment. This mosaic is Chávez Morado's take on the pre-Columbian myth of Quetzalcoatl. Its imagery and content has no correlation to the purpose of the science tower which it decorates, although it may have the stronger connection to the building now that it has been repurposed. However, the content of the mosaic does increase the success of the work's plastic integration. This is a result of Chávez Morado's choice to represent Quetzalcoatl as a boat upon which the other characters are traveling. The mosaic sits directly above a reflecting pool. In fact, the reflecting pools act as a continuation of the water upon which Quetzalcoatl sails. While the theme or content of other works designed for CU interact with their location in an intellectual way *the Return of Quetzalcoatl* is the only work which interacts in a visual way.

NATIONAL INTEGRATION

Chávez Morado valued plastic integration as a useful device for furthering national integration and a strong supporter of Mexican people from a variety of jobs and classes working together to develop national destinations and a national industry. He believed that if men of industry, art, and culture worked together, a national culture would develop. To Chávez Morado, the multifaceted orientation of plastic integration, which required artists with various specialties, architects, engineers, and laborers to work together to develop a coherent work was equal in importance to the aesthetics of plastic integration, which resulted in a public work and attracted tourism. However, his choice to integrate the mosaics developed for CU with the surrounding environment, architecture, and the choices of other workers, was not the only way in which Chávez Morado fostered the concept of national integration within the mosaics he developed for CU. The theme of each mosaic can also be interpreted as either a representation of national integration or of the actions necessary to develop this integration. The imagery of *the Return of Quetzalcoatl*, composed of the embodiment of important global societies, each related to a distinct form modern Mexican society, acts as both a literal and a symbolic representation of the national integration important to Chávez Morado. Nationalism, defined as promoting the interests of a particular state, group or culture, but Chávez Morado's understanding united Mexican people of all backgrounds to overcome differences and develop a national society that limited exploitation and benefitted the country. The figures of *the Return of Quetzalcoatl* merge together in harmony, having

overcome their differences. While each figure represents a different period and culture the behavior of each should be together interpreted as a reflection of the ways in which the Mexican people should interact with one another. While *the Conquest of Energy* is a representation of humanities relationship with science and technology, beginning with the discovery of fire and ending with the development of bombs, it may also be viewed as a representation of the people working together to develop technology, which has become a product of industry. This second role of the mosaic strongly correlates with Chávez Morado's belief that workers and those who own industry must work together in unison to develop industry. His choice to represent all of the figures with similar features rather than distinguishing them from one another highlights his belief that cultural, ethnic and socio-economic differences should not be factors in hindering the union of all Mexican people in a national culture.

The themes of *the Conquest of Energy* and *the Return of Quetzalcoatl* reflect not only national ideologies, but also the ideologies of the university. The progression of technology reflected in *the Conquest of Energy* is a reflection of CU's mission of future progress. Although the furthest point of the mosaic represents the dangers of energy technology, this acts only as a warning of the possibilities, not as a call to end the progression of technological development. The fruit tree at the far right of the composition can be read as representing the future possibilities of energy technology and that the development of nuclear bombs is not the death or end of technological advancements, despite its destruction. *The Return of Quetzalcoatl* reflects the goal of educating the Mexican people rather than a singular group.

LOCATION

The Return of Quetzalcoatl and *the Conquest of Energy* adorn the original faculty science building that now houses the architecture department, located on the eastern side of campus, on the other side of Las Islas from the mosaics developed by the other artists. While Siqueiros's and O'Gorman's mosaics once communicated with one another, the location of the science faculty building isolated Chávez Morado's mosaics from the works developed by the other artists. Their location on the building further isolated the mosaics. *The Conquest of Energy* adorns the convex outer wall of the Auditorio Alfonso Caso, connected to the northern wall of the architecture building and itself a northern wall. Unlike *the Return of Quetzalcoatl*, it is visible to those who pass by the building. However, both the original student drop off location and the one used today position students to the west of the faculty science building rather than to its north. When students arrive on campus and walk towards the building they fail to see the mosaic until they walk past the auditorium. The space to the north of the building is far more limited than that to the left of the building as well. As a result, a location on the western wall of the building would have made work more accessible. *The Return of Quetzalcoatl*, located on El Anexo de Arquitectura inside the building's courtyard, cannot be viewed by pedestrians walking past the building. Students and visitors must actively choose to enter the courtyard to view the work.

NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND EL CENTRO MEDICO

CU was not the only location in which Chávez Morado utilized plastic integration to inspire and develop national integration. The artist made use of the same technique six years later, in 1958, when he developed a work for the façade of the Centro Médico's classrooms. As in the case of CU, the architecture of the building was already developed. Chávez Morado was commissioned but this did not stop him from creating a work which both responded to the building's architecture and relied on the knowledge and work of other craftsmen. Despite having little prior experience with sculpture, Chávez Morado chose to develop a frieze-like relief sculpture for the building which chronicled the history and future of medicine in Mexico. Due to his lack of experience working with sculpture, Chávez Morado enlisted the help of his brother and skilled sculptor, Tomás Chávez Morado. The union of these two artists to develop the work for the Centro Médico reflected Jose Chávez Morado's belief that workers from a variety of specialties must work together to develop works and locations of public interest which would help to develop a national culture.

The annex which Chávez Morado's relief sculpture adorns has an unusual architecture. Although from the outside it appears as that of a long single story building, the interior offers composed of eight classrooms, each of which externally reflects by a curved arch roof. The building, raised one floor above ground level houses four stairwells with flat rooves that separate the classrooms from one another. Chávez

Morado chose to highlight the distinctive geometric architecture of the roof by developing the relief sculpture as a mosaic of large, overlapping stone planes many of which are primarily rectangular in shape. The result of their angularity is that the flat rooves of the stairwells appear more strongly connected to the building's architecture. The arched rooves of the classrooms are not isolated by Chávez Morado's work either, the artist also chose to include several organic and flowing shapes within the relief sculpture, such as pre-Columbian mythological figures and the human body. Chávez Morado further emphasizes the work as a planar mosaic by incorporating multiple natural stones, each of a different color. The pink, red, black and grey natural stone further divide the individual planes and increase the visual interest of the work.

The work which Chávez Morado developed for the Centro Médico is a representation of the progression of medical knowledge in Mexico. The first couple panels of the work are a representation of pre-Columbian mythology and scientific knowledge.⁶⁴ These panels include the tree of knowledge, Quetzalcoatl, and indigenous people's practicing medicine. The fourth and fifth panels of the work reflect medical knowledge and practices during the Spanish colonial period and include references to the medical work of monastic orders. The sixth and seventh panels represent modern medical knowledge. The figures represented within these panels are modern doctors and students, a patient being examined by modern technology and human anatomy. The last panels of the work depict humanities continual exploration of medicine and science.

While developing the relief sculpture for the Centro Médico, Chávez Morado focused on both the conquest of nature by man and the concept of the development of

⁶⁴ The work is divided into panels which reflect the four stairwells and the arched roof of the building.

medicine for the people.⁶⁵ The second concept coincides with the development of nationalized medicine for a national society. As discussed above, Chávez Morado believed that the works developed by artists and other craftsmen should develop a national interest in public things and national destinations. It is also important to note that the Mexican mural movement of the twentieth-century was originally developed, at least in theory, to relay information to a Mexican audience. If the work the artist developed successfully drew national interest and relayed its message to the Mexican people as the artist intended then it not only furthered his nationalistic cause through being developed by workers from a variety of skillsets and as existing as a national destination but also through representing his nationalistic ideologies to those who viewed the work.

Although in some ways more political than the mosaics which Chávez Morado developed for CU, the relief sculpture which the artist developed for the Centro Médico was developed with the same techniques and ideologies. Chávez Morado emphasizes the dominant architectural features of the hospital annex within his work, developed a link between the work's theme and the role of the building, united the work of a variety of craftsmen and workers and incorporated a symbolic call for nationalism.

Despite believing that plastic integration served as merely a means to an end, in 1952 Chávez Morado developed *the Return of Quetzalcoatl* and *the Conquest of Energy* for CU. He highly integrated each of these works with the architecture of the building they adorned and the surrounding environment. *The Conquest of Energy*, like the works of the other artists commissioned to develop works for CU, reflected the original role of

⁶⁵ José Chávez Morado and Raquel Tibol, *José Chávez Morado: imágenes de identidad Mexicana*, (México: Coordinación de Humanidades, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1980), 33.

the Faculty Science Building which it adorns. The works reflect Chávez Morado's ideologies through their depiction of the development of a nationalized Mexico which overlooks social differences and through their representation of the people working together to develop technology. The mosaics also reflect the goals of the University through their representation of a Mexican culture and the forward march of technological development within Mexico.

Figure 20. José Chávez Morado: *The Return of Quetzalcoatl*. Mosaic, 1952. Architecture Department Building/Old Faculty Science Building, CU, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 21. José Chávez Morado: *The Conquest of Energy* Mosaic, 1952. Architecture Department Building/Old Faculty Science Building, CU, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 22. José Chávez Morado: *Medicine in the History of Mexico*. Stone Relief Sculpture, 1958. Centro Médico, Mexico City, Mexico.

Figure 23. José Chávez Morado: *Medicine in the History of Mexico*. Stone Relief Sculpture, 1958. Centro Médico, Mexico City, Mexico.

CONCLUSION

The mosaics developed for CU were highly influential works in the history of the Mexican mural movement and twentieth-century Mexican art. Prior to their development, the murals created for the movement offered interpretations of the Mexican Revolution that sought to relay a political and ideological message to the masses. They decorated important but antiquated buildings that were neither developed to display monumental murals nor to represent modernity in Mexico. The modern style of CU's newly developed buildings designed with the knowledge that mosaics would adorn their exteriors and aid in the representation of modern Mexico prevented the continuation of the style of the early mural movement. More important the monumental exterior placement of these mosaics on newly developed buildings provided each artist with an opportunity to create a work that experimented with the concepts of plastic integration. The mosaics developed for CU and the works developed for the Mexican mural movement after this monumental architectural project, did more than simply decorate the interior of a building and relay a message to the masses. Their designs incorporated sculptural, architectural and environmental features in a manner that united them with the architecture of the buildings they adorned, the Mexican environment and the cultural identity of the region. While each of the mosaics designed for CU fell short of the vision of the artists who developed them in some way the progress each represents is undeniable and was necessary for the further future development of the movement

The primary goal of the development of CU was to create a modern Mexican campus that not only presented modern ideas to the university's students but also acted as a catalyst for further modernization within the country. While those in charge of the project sought to develop a campus that reflected the staples of global modernity, these leaders also wanted to highlight what it meant for Mexico to be modern. Mexican identity was not to be replaced with the ideals of modernism. Instead, the project set out to infuse the two concepts. As a result, the campus's development, a highly ambitious project, invited the leading architects, engineers, and artists of Mexico to work together to develop an institution with architecture inspired by Le Corbusier's international style and plastic integration that highlighted important aspects of the post-Revolutionary Mexican culture of the mid-twentieth-century. Lazo and other important figures believed that the inclusion of Mexican art such as monumental mosaics was a significant and efficient manner through which to develop this fusion. As a result, Lazo originally presented the development of CU as the first great opportunity for plastic integration within Mexico. In the beginning, the opportunity for architects and artists to work together and share ideas to ensure this fusion enthused those working on the project.. Although the planners provided only O'Gorman the opportunity to unite the architectural development of a building with the creation of a mosaic, the project opened the doors for future unified development and provided each artist with an opportunity to develop their understanding of plastic integration. The unification of modernity with Mexican identity and culture within the campus is further strengthened by the decision to develop CU on the pedregal of San Angel. The rock unites not only the modern architecture of CU with the natural beauty of Mexico but also the campus with pre-Columbian mythology, connecting

modernity with formative Mexican history. O’Gorman most strongly represented this concept. The artist united the modern architecture of the building with the pre-Columbian style imagery of his mosaic with the inclusion of a pedregal wall outside of the library. The wall serves as a part of the library as an architectural feature but is decorated with pre-Columbian relief sculpture. Pedregal stone is a medium that was important to pre-Columbian architecture and myth and is decorated with pre-Columbian imagery.

The mosaics developed for CU play an integral role in the development of a modern Mexican campus and the commission for each mosaic was not assigned lightly. The artistic and ideological career of each artist reflects the necessary role played by the mosaic they designed. The role of each mosaic was influenced by the building which it adorns and the location of the building within the campus. Siqueiros received a commission to develop a work for the Rectorio Tower, Rivera the Olympic Stadium, O’Gorman the Central Library and Chávez Morado the Faculty Science Building which now houses UNAM’s architectural program.

As an enthusiastic supporter of the development of CU, Siqueiros strongly believed that the opportunity for plastic integration provided by the campus’s development would provide the spark necessary to ignite the Mexican mural movement. The opportunity provided to Siqueiros and the other artists to develop a mosaic for CU forever changed the relationship between Mexican murals and the buildings they adorned, although not in the radical political direction the artist had hoped. Despite his disappointment, Siqueiros accepted a commission to develop a mosaic for the university and designed three panels for the Rectorio Tower: *The People of the University, the*

University for the People, The Right to Culture, and New University Symbol. He incorporated sculpted painting into his style ensuring the inclusion of plastic integration. This decision incorporated the environment into the work because it allowed for motorists to easily interact with it. Siqueiros was likely commissioned to develop a work for the Rectory Tower because the building housed CU's important offices and was the first building students saw when entering campus from the original student drop off location. It reflected his vocal and important role within the Mexican mural movement and the modernization of Mexico. Siqueiros highlighted the importance of the Rectory Tower with *The People of the University, the University for the People* which welcomes students to CU and beckons them towards forwarding progress and nods to important historical dates through the development of *The Right to Culture* which prominently features these dates as a reminder of their importance to Mexican identity.

Juan O'Gorman, the only muralist commissioned to develop the architecture of the building his mosaic adorns, offered a work in which the mosaic unites with the building's architecture through elements outside of the mosaic itself. Presumably, his fame as an architect of highly functional spaces was the reason for his commission as the architect of the Central Library which would require modern functionalism. O'Gorman designed the *Historical Representation of Culture* as a codex which outlines a symbolic representation of Mexican history beginning with the pre-Columbian era and ending in the modern age and integrated the pre-Columbian tendencies of this work with the modern architecture of the library with a pedregal wall outside of the library. The codex design of his mosaic further integrated the work with the building by making the external walls of the library a book. The heavy pre-Columbian influence of his mosaic argues that

modern Mexico is dependent on its history. The strong modern features of the library emphasize the strength of modernity within the country.

Diego Rivera was the only artist commissioned to develop a mosaic for CU who failed to complete his original design. *The University, the Mexican Family, Peace and Youth Sports* in its original form represented the history of sport in Mexico and highlighted the importance of sports to the University and Mexican society as a whole. Rivera's work argues that modern Mexico is highly influenced by its history through its strong integration with the environment. Rivera made use of the pedregal rock, important to pre-Columbian architecture and mythology to develop his mosaic. The artist believed that plastic integration required unity of architecture, mosaic, and sculpture and aimed to develop a work which was strongly united with the surrounding environment. His commission to develop the mosaic for the Olympic Stadium is fitting as the stadium's architecture was developed to reflect the surrounding environment. The stadium is sunk into the ground and it reflects the appearance of a volcano.

Unlike the other artists commissioned to develop works for CU, José Chávez Morado developed two mosaics: *The Return of Quetzalcoatl* and *The Conquest of Energy*. *The Return of Quetzalcoatl* is a symbolic representation of the various cultural influences which helped to form Mexican society and a reflection of the need for workers from all specializations to unite. *The Conquest of Energy* is a representation of the development of humanity from the dark, which represents ignorance, to the light, which represents knowledge and technology. While Chávez Morado's understanding of plastic integration was similar to that of the other artists, his purpose for developing it was far different. The artist believed that plastic integration was important because it united

required workers of various specializations to develop a cohesive work. The works Chávez Morado developed for CU mimic the architecture of the faculty science building and the surrounding environment without making use of sculptural elements.

When taken as a whole the artists, with the possible exception of Chávez Morado, believed that each of their works fell short of the potential they held as works of plastic integration, modernism and the future of the Mexican mural movement. Siqueiros was the most vocal about this position. From the moment he realized that the artists and architects of the project would not be provided the opportunity to work alongside one another, Siqueiros argued that he and the other artists commissioned by Lazo could not be held responsible for the failures of the mosaics they developed.⁶⁶ Siqueiros believed that the result of Lazo's decision was that the mosaics each artist developed were not works of plastic integration. However, Siqueiros also argued, after the completion of his mosaic, that the work was hindered by the budgetary restraints of the project and a lack of the technology necessary to develop his vision.⁶⁷ O'Gorman likewise shared doubts about the combination of the architecture he developed for the Central Library and the mosaic he developed to cover it. His doubts were perhaps the result of Lazo's rejection of the original architectural design of the artist which featured a pyramidal composition.⁶⁸ The original architectural design would have resulted in a tighter integration between the codex form of the mosaic and the composition of the building. It would have meant that the two shared a deep connection to pre-Columbian tradition. The failures of Rivera's mosaic are the most obvious. *The University* would have been more successful as a work

⁶⁶ Siqueiros, "Precepts," 208.

⁶⁷ Siqueiros, "Precepts," 208.

⁶⁸ Nixon Cooke. "A Return to the Earth," 59.

of plastic integration than any of the other mosaics designed for CU if health, time and budgetary restraints had not prevented the artist from completing the mosaic. *The University* was developed using the pedregal stone present in the surrounding environment and aids the Olympic Stadium in developing the appearance of a volcano. The completed panel of the mosaic provides the area it covers with a finished appearance not present for the rest of the Stadium. Unlike the mosaics developed by Siqueiros and Chávez Morado which cover only a portion of the buildings they adorn and act as an accent, the mosaic Rivera developed was meant to surround the stadium and complete the building's architecture.

While it is true that the works fell short of the expectations of the artists, none of the works fail to play the roles intended for them by those in charge of the architectural project and each, in its own way, was still able to further the Mexican mural movement and 20th century Mexican art in general. Each work had its own unique relationship with the architecture of the building which it adorned. Surprisingly, while Siqueiros was the most vocal about the importance of the integration of the mosaic being developed with the architecture, *the People of the University, the University for the People* has the strongest disconnect from the architecture of the building it adorns of any of the mosaics developed. His emphasis on sculptural painting seems to push the three-dimensional elements of his work away from the architecture of the Rectory Tower rather than unite the mosaic and the building. O'Gorman's *Historical Representation of Culture* has the opposite appearance. The flat, two-dimensional appearance of the mosaic's composition create the impression that the Central Library has been adorned with a pre-Columbian codex which is permanently fixed in the walls of the building. *The University* appears to

complete the architecture of the Olympic Stadium. While Chávez Morado's *the Conquest of Energy* and *the Return of Quetzalcoatl* echo important architectural features of the faculty science building they adorn through two-dimensional means.

Each work emphasizes the role of the building which it adorns. Siqueiros's *the People of the University, the University for the People*, reflects the importance of the Rectory Tower as the home for important offices and the first building students had contact with when entering the university by welcoming the students to CU and emphasizing the progress these students would make for Mexico. The *Historical Representation of Culture*, presented as a codex, highlighted the literary and documentary purpose of the Central Library by turning its exterior into a representation of the texts housed within its walls. *The University* was meant to reflect the importance of sports not only to the university but also to the development of Mexican society and the Mexican family. *The Conquest of Energy* both highlighted the scientific nature of the building it adorned and emphasized the technological progress which allowed the modern age to develop. *The Return of Quetzalcoatl* emphasized the importance of workers and individuals from different backgrounds coming together to develop modern Mexico and to decrease exploitation.

The development of mosaics by Siqueiros, O'Gorman, Rivera and Chávez Morado for CU was an important step in preventing CU from solely reflecting global modern ideas and ignoring important aspects of Mexican identity. Muralism had been an important aspect of Mexican identity since the early 1920s and strongly differentiated CU from modern campuses worldwide. While the inclusion of these mosaics united CU with Mexican identity the use of plastic integration rather than traditional iconography

reflected the conservative shift in the political regime of the period. It is only within the context of representing Mexican identity and this political shift that the inclusion of these mosaics in the CU project makes sense. The modernist architectural styles of the time such as Le Corbusier's International Style and Functionalism strongly emphasized minimalism and the efficient use of materials. Large scale decoration, such as the mosaics developed for the campus do not fall into this category. The development of plastic integration in the CU mosaics acted as a catalyst in the development of future monumental works within Mexico over the next several decades.

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