

Exhibition: *Found in Translation: Design in California and Mexico, 1915–1985*

On View: September 17, 2017–April 1, 2018

Location: Resnick Pavilion



(Images on page 7)

(Los Angeles—July 5, 2017) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art presents *Found in Translation: Design in California and Mexico, 1915–1985*, the first exhibition to explore the full range of design and architecture dialogues between California and Mexico from 1915 to 1985. *Found in Translation* features more than 250 objects including furniture, metalwork, ceramics, costume, textiles, paintings, sculpture, architectural drawings and photographs, mural studies, posters, ephemera, and film by over 200 artists, architects, designers, and craftspeople.

*Found in Translation* is one of five exhibitions presented by LACMA as part of the Getty's Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA initiative, and is organized by Wendy Kaplan, curator and head of the Decorative Arts and Design department, and Staci Steinberger, assistant curator of decorative arts and design.

"*Found in Translation* demonstrates LACMA's ongoing commitment to Latin American art from the pre-Hispanic period to the present day," said LACMA CEO and Wallis Annenberg Director Michael Govan. "This groundbreaking exhibition highlights the unique strength of an encyclopedic museum. Curators from many different departments leveraged their expertise to contribute to the catalogue and advise on object selection, from works of decorative arts and design, art of the ancient Americas, and Latin American art to costume and textiles, photography, and Modern art."

"In organizing *Found in Translation*, we have made it a priority to acquire for LACMA's collection Mexican and California objects that speak to a dialogue between

the two places,” said Wendy Kaplan and Staci Steinberger. “Modern Mexican design treasures include posters from the 1968 Mexico City Olympics, a Hand Chair by Pedro Friedeberg, ceramics by Felix Tissot, and enamels by Miguel Pineda, which are all highlights of the exhibition.”

### **Exhibition Overview**

California and Mexico are irrevocably joined by geography, culture, and economics—ties that precede and transcend modern political borders. For centuries, people have moved back and forth between the two places, bringing objects, styles, and images whose meanings were shared as well as altered.

Political conflict has often marred the relationship between the United States and Mexico, especially during the Mexican-American War (1846–48) and the Mexican Revolution (1910–20). Despite this, the histories of California and Mexico are inextricably linked: both belonged to Spain before 1821 and from that date until 1848, California was part of Mexico. California's fascination with Mexico emerged in the late 19th century with the pre-Hispanic and Spanish Colonial revivals. The vogue for these styles peaked in the 1920s and 1930s with the added embrace of Mexican folk art and murals. In turn, in the 1930s and '40s California's own Spanish Colonial styles became popular in Mexico. And after World War II, Mexico looked to California as a model of modernity—its highways and high-rises promising “The American Way of Life.”

The exhibition examines these interdependencies through four themes: *Spanish Colonial Inspiration*, *Pre-Hispanic Revivals*, *Folk Art and Craft Traditions*, and *Modernism*. All explore how, in California and Mexico, design and architecture are strongly rooted in a sense of place, with local materials and traditions used to form a culture of specificity rather than an “international style.” And each found a more distinct voice through “translations” of the other.

### **Spanish Colonial Inspiration**

The Spanish Colonial was a dominant style in California and Mexico during the 1920s and 1930s, and its influence lingered for decades. Manifestation on both sides of the border attest to the diverse meanings—about nationalism, place, and social class—attached to what might look like the same visual vocabulary. The revival emerged in California in the late 1800s with romantic depictions of ruins of Franciscan missions from the previous century. Their red-tile roofs, arches, and white

stucco walls were appealing, but something grander was required for Golden State exceptionalism.

In 1915, the Panama-California Exposition in San Diego became the first U.S. fair to focus on a regional style. Its elaborate Spanish Baroque architecture had never been used in California, and the revival became a statewide craze. Nostalgia for an imagined past provided a reassuring sense of place for civic and domestic buildings alike. Architects conflated the simplicity of missions with vernacular adobe buildings and elements of the Spanish Baroque.

In Mexico, the Neocolonial (the term for Spanish Colonial revival there) played an essential role in the creation of national identity after the turbulent years of the Mexican Revolution. The new government saw the Neocolonial as a unifying force rooted in the country's past, combining Spanish and indigenous traditions. In the 1930s, the revival took a domestic turn in the *Colonial californiano*, when the styles that California had borrowed from Mexico were reappropriated by that country's elite for their associations with prosperity and the American good life.

### **Pre-Hispanic Revivals**

In both Mexico and California, the pre-Hispanic past was integral to the goal of constructing a sense of place. This section explores parallel revivals, as well as Mexico's influence on California. While Mexico's elite had celebrated historical indigenous leaders long before the country gained its independence from Spain in 1821, after this period, they particularly invoked Aztec warriors and rulers to symbolize the power of the centralized Mexican state. Starting in the 1920s, the ideology of nation building became more inclusive, encompassing a broader range of Mesoamerican civilizations and social classes. Pre-Hispanic imagery was frequently used to emphasize Mexico's unique heritage, and representations of the Maya, Zapotec, Mixtec, and Aztec civilizations became key emblems of identity.

The art and architecture of Mexico's ancient civilizations helped establish a visual identity for the New World in both Mexico and California. In Mexico, the emphasis on indigenous cultures also promoted the ideal of *mestizaje*—melding Amerindian and Spanish cultures—in order to abolish centuries-old class, regional, and racial divisions. When the pre-Hispanic revival was transferred to California in the 1920s, it lost much of its nationalistic fervor. In the 1930s and 1940s, it sometimes served a political agenda of hemispheric harmony, spread by the U.S. government and by Mexican artists, such as Diego Rivera. Until reappropriated by the Chicano civil rights

movement in the late 1960s, however, the pre-Hispanic revival styles in California were often no more than an exotic veneer applied to theaters and hotels.

### **Folk Art and Craft Traditions**

Artists and designers in both Mexico and California romanticized the former's indigenous artisans, adopting elements of traditional crafts and reimagining native rituals. In Mexico, the post-Revolution government elevated the handcrafts (called "popular art") and customs of indigenous populations into emblems of national identity. Under the regime of authoritarian president Porfirio Díaz, technocratic elites had viewed rural artisans as a hindrance to progress. But in the 1920s, the new leadership embraced living traditions, organizing projects such as the 1921 *Exposición de arte popular* in an effort to forge a unified culture from a war-torn nation. Even as the country industrialized, designers returned to vernacular forms and materials. Clara Porset adapted the *butaca*, or chair, to a distinctly Mexican version of modernism, while Ramón Valdiosera updated the *china poblana* costume to create styles more suitable for urban women.

In California, the idealization of traditional craft represented a larger pursuit of "authentic" experience. Industrialized societies revered native cultures as "purer" and attuned to nature, imbuing handmade goods with a halo of time-honored practice. Mexico's official exhibitions and publications made its traditional crafts accessible to Californians, who reconfigured folk forms and techniques in their art as well as commercial products. Enamored by folk art as well as the people who made it, designers and craftspeople journeyed to small villages, seeking a rural idyll as a respite to fast-paced city life.

### **Modernism**

While much has been written about the embrace of international modernism in Mexico, few have addressed the impact of progressive California design and architecture there. Mexican architects were deeply influenced by their California counterparts, especially the Case Study Houses published between 1945 and 1966 in editor John Entenza's *Arts & Architecture* magazine. And not only did architect Richard Neutra have a profound impact in Mexico, he also helped bring recognition of Mexican modernism back to California. He was one of several native or adoptive Californians who proselytized for the country's new architecture and design. Furthermore, architecture writers such as Esther Born, Irving E. Myers, and Esther McCoy introduced Americans—particularly California readers—to under-recognized buildings worthy of comparison with the best in modern architecture.

The narrative of California/Mexico exchange continues to the mid-1980s as major California architects such as John Lautner began working in Mexico in the 1970s; and conversely, Mexican architect Ricardo Legorreta began receiving commissions in California in 1985. Chicano muralism thrived in communities such as San Diego's Barrio Logan and in East Los Angeles, where it continues to function as a unifying marker of identity.

Additionally, the exhibition's 1915–1985 survey allows a comparison between the Mexico City Olympics in 1968 and the Los Angeles Olympics in 1984. The bold graphic and environmental design program devised for Mexico 68 had a marked influence on the visual language of L.A. 84. In both places, graphic design was essential to way-finding schemes as well as to each city's distinctive branding. The exhibition concludes with comparisons of burgeoning growth and urban sprawl as well as new voices of dissent in both places, all attesting to the richness and complexities in an ever-evolving dialogue.

### **Catalogue**

*Found in Translation: Design in California and Mexico, 1915–1985* is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue edited by Wendy Kaplan, featuring essays by her and exhibition co-curator Staci Steinberger as well as by other leading scholars. The 350 illustrations include designs by Richard Neutra, Luis Barragán, Charles and Ray Eames, and Clara Porset. The hardcover book published by Prestel is \$65 and serves as a follow-up to LACMA's acclaimed design publication *California Design, 1930–1965: Living in a Modern Way*.

### **Public Programming**

Latin Sounds

Sunday, September 24, 2017 | 3–5 pm

Join us for a special Latin Sounds on Sunday, September 24 with legendary percussionist Pete Escovedo in conjunction with *Found in Translation*.

Visit [lacma.org](http://lacma.org) in the coming weeks for additional exhibition-related programming.

**Credit:** This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

*Found in Translation: Design in California and Mexico, 1915–1985* is part of Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA, a far-reaching and ambitious exploration of Latin American and Latino art in dialogue with Los Angeles, taking place from September 2017 through January 2018 at more than 70 cultural institutions across Southern California. Pacific Standard Time is an initiative of the Getty. The presenting sponsor is Bank of America.



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### **About LACMA**

Since its inception in 1965, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography, in addition to representing Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection that includes more than 130,000 objects dating from antiquity to the present, encompassing the geographic world and nearly the entire history of art. Among the museum's strengths are its holdings of Asian art; Latin American art, ranging from masterpieces from the Ancient Americas to works by leading modern and contemporary artists; and Islamic art, of which LACMA hosts one of the most significant collections in the world. A museum of international stature as well as a vital part of Southern California, LACMA shares its vast collections through exhibitions, public programs, and research facilities that attract over one million visitors annually, in addition to serving millions through digital initiatives such as online collections, scholarly catalogues, and interactive engagement. LACMA is located in Hancock Park, 30 acres situated at the center of Los Angeles, which also contains the La Brea Tar Pits and Museum and the forthcoming Academy Museum of Motion Pictures. Situated halfway between the ocean and downtown, LACMA is at the heart of Los Angeles.

**Location:** 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA, 90036. [lacma.org](http://lacma.org)

**Image captions:**

(Left) Francisco Artigas, *House at 131 Rocas, Jardines del Pedregal, Mexico City*, 1966, photo by Roberto and Fernando Luna, 1966, © Roberto and Fernando Luna

(Center, left) David Klein, *Los Angeles*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1966, gift of Martha and Bruce Karsh in honor of the museum's 50th anniversary

(Center, right) Julia Johnson-Marshall, Lance Wyman, *Edecán Dress and Cape from the XIX Olympics*, 1968, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, purchased with funds provided by the Bernard and Edith Lewin Collection of Mexican Art Deaccession Fund

(Right) President Porfirio Diaz, *El Piano Zapoteca* (Gold Medal Winner at Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1900), c. 1900, Lance Aaron and Family, photo by Adam Schreiber

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**About Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA**

Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA is a far-reaching and ambitious exploration of Latin American and Latino art in dialogue with Los Angeles taking place from September 2017 through January 2018. Led by the Getty, Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA is a collaboration of arts institutions across Southern California.

Through a series of thematically linked exhibitions and programs, Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA highlights different aspects of Latin American and Latino art from the ancient world to the present day. With topics such as luxury arts in the pre-Columbian Americas, 20th century Afro-Brazilian art, alternative spaces in Mexico City, and boundary-crossing practices of Latino artists, exhibitions range from monographic studies of individual artists to broad surveys that cut across numerous countries.

Supported by more than \$17 million in grants from the Getty Foundation, Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA involves more than 70 cultural institutions from Los Angeles to Palm Springs, and from San Diego to Santa Barbara. Pacific Standard Time is an initiative of the Getty. The presenting sponsor is Bank of America.