



Figure 1 Tania Candiani and Luis Felipe Ortega,
Possessing Nature, Pavilion of Mexico: Arsenale,
Venice Biennale 2015 (press kit)

Retelling the History of the Mexico Pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia

Carolina Nieto Ruiz

University of Washington, USA

Abstract This chapter presents a revised history of the Mexico Pavilions in La Biennale di Venezia. Official discourse on Mexican Pavilions published in the twenty-first century contain significant inconsistencies and omissions about Mexico's twentieth century participations. These inaccuracies have been repeatedly published in the press, effectively rewriting history. I argue that a more complete historical narrative is necessary for a richer understanding of Mexico's contribution to the international art scene. First, I examine historical inconsistencies in exhibition publications from 2007-17. Next, I construct a narrative history of the Mexico Pavilions in three stages, in accordance with their aesthetics and contexts of production: post-revolutionary (1950, 1952, 1958, 1968), rupture (1986), and transnational (2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2017, 2019). Finally, I offer some concluding remarks and suggestions for further research.

Keywords Mexico Pavilion. La Biennale di Venezia. Historical revision. Twentieth century Mexican Art. Twenty-first century Mexican Art.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Inconsistencies in the History of the Mexico Pavilion. – 3 Post-Revolutionary Nationalistic Mexico Pavilions: 1950, 1952, 1958, 196. – 4 The Rupture Pavilion: 1986. – 5 The Transnational Pavilions: 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017. – 6 Concluding Thoughts.

1 Introduction

La Biennale di Venezia is the oldest and most important international art exhibition in the world. Since the first Biennale in 1895, it has become both a world-renowned international art institution and a critical tool for cultural diplomacy. The first national pavilion, belonging to Belgium, appeared in 1907



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(cf. Ventimiglia 1996). National pavilions have grown in number ever since, increasing to 29 in 1995, and to 70 in 2015.

The scholar Edgardo Bermejo Mora (2015) claims that when a nation presents a pavilion at La Biennale, it demonstrates economic stability and a strong interest in developing its artistic and cultural production. The process requires economic resources, tough negotiations, international logistics, promoting the event at home and abroad, and mediating the voices of many different actors without losing sight of the diplomatic importance of the event. For those involved, a national pavilion is a tremendous source of pride. In the case of Mexico, narratives of pride in the national pavilions are somewhat undermined by inconsistencies in the historical record of Biennale participation. Starting in 2007, official documentation of the Mexico Pavilions began to omit almost all of the twentieth century pavilions. This may be due to a lack of effort to collect, track, or verify this history. Instead, Mexican art historians have addressed individual pavilions as part of their work on specific artists, curators, or movements.¹ In this chapter, I offer a more complete history of Mexican participation in international art exhibitions by shedding light on the repeated omissions of the Mexico Pavilions from official histories. First, I will examine historical inconsistencies in exhibition publications from 2007-17. Next, I will construct a narrative history of the Mexico Pavilions in three stages, in accordance with their aesthetics and contexts of production: post-revolutionary (1950, 1952, 1958, 1968), rupture (1986), and transnational (2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2017, 2019). Finally, I will offer some concluding remarks and suggestions for further research [tab. 1].

I gathered evidence for this work through archival research at the Archivio Storico delle arte contemporanee di Venezia in June, 2015; at Biblioteca de las Artes in Mexico City in May, 2016; using the online database of the International Center for the Arts of the Americas, created by the Museum of Fine Arts in Houston; and by reviewing the online digital archives and published materials of Mexico's National Institute of Fine Arts (INBA).

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1 See: Carlos A. Molina (2013, 2014) and Alejandro Ugalde (2014) for the Mexico Pavilions from 1950 to 1968, García Gomez (2009) for the Mexico Pavilion in 1986 and Edgardo Bermejo Mora (2015) for the Pavilion of 2009.

2 Inconsistencies in the History of the Mexico Pavilion

Founded in 1947, INBA has produced all of the Mexico Pavilions to date, and has been responsible for the selection of its contributors (Molina 2014). As Martínez Martínez (2008) states, in 1988 the INBA became part of the National Council for Art and Culture (CONACULTA), so catalogues from the Mexico Pavilion contain joint press releases from INBA and CONACULTA, including remarks from the directors of both institutions on how Mexico is honoured to be included in La Biennale. In spite of national pride, the published history of the Mexico Pavilions is incomplete. Mexico's presence at twentieth century Biennali has been largely omitted from twenty-first century INBA publications.

Mexico Pavilions have been featured at every Biennale since 2007. The same text, written by Mexico's curatorship team, appears in both the Mexico Pavilion catalogue for 2007 and in Mexico's section of the catalogue of the 52. Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte:

Mexico's first presence at the Venice Biennale was over 50 years ago at its 25th edition. Fernando Gamboa, a leading promoter of Mexican art and commissioner of the Mexico Pavilion, presented the works of Orozco, Rivera, Siqueiros and Tamayo, giving rise to what European critics called 'The revelation of Mexican painting' [...] The 52th International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale is a great opportunity for Mexico to reopen an institutional door for its contemporary art to the international forum. Achieving an active of Mexican artists on the world stage is a shared desire of Mexican society and its national cultural institutions. (Biennale 52 2007, 88)

The language of "first presence", juxtaposed with "opportunity... to reopen", implies that there was only one Mexico Pavilion prior to 2007 - effectively omitting five pavilions from the historical narrative. Mexican newspapers referencing these texts reproduced the error. For example, the cultural section of *La Jornada* published an article that states:

After more than 50 years, Mexico will officially participate for the second time at the Venice Biennale.²

The inaccuracy is even more pronounced in the official press bulletin for the 2007 Mexico Pavilion, which claims that it is Mexico's "first

² Carlos Paul, "México vuelve a la Bienal de Venecia tras una ausencia de más de 50 años", *La Jornada*, 6 de junio de 2007.

official national representation”.³ This same inaccuracy occurred in 2009, where there were no specific mentions of earlier pavilions in the Mexico Pavilion catalogues, nor in La Biennale’s catalogues of earlier national participations. However, the press bulletin for the 2009 Mexico Pavilion states:

Mexico presents its second official national representation at the 53rd International Art Exhibition, La Biennale de Venezia.⁴

This implies that the INBA is not considering any of the Mexico Pavilions of the twentieth century as an official national representation.

In the 2011 Mexico pavilion catalogue, an essay by Gastón Ramirez Feltrin states:

La primera aparición de México en la Bienal de Venecia se remonta a 1914... Lamentablemente, debido a las contradicciones y conflictos por los que pasaba el país, el arte mexicano perdió su presencia en Venecia por muchos años.

Durante la década de 1950 México participó en tres ocasiones, proyectando el arte mexicano en el ámbito internacional. Y en un largo paréntesis de casi medio siglo nuestro país participó cinco veces más; la últimas tres como invitado de las exposiciones del Instituto Italo-Latinoamericano. Es hasta el año 2007 que México cuenta finalmente con un pabellón nacional. (Ramirez Feltrin 2011, 109)⁵

Despite his apparent concern over the ‘lost presence’ of Mexican art, Ramirez Feltrin completely omits the Mexico Pavilions of 1968 and 1986, and diminishes the Mexico Pavilions of the 1950s by referring to them only as ‘participations’, comparable with the works of Mexican artists presented in collective international exhibitions within La Biennale. Additionally, Dario Ventimiglia recalls Mexico’s participation in the 1914 Biennale, but not as a pavillion (1996, 76-7). Archival research corroborates this: there is no evidence or mention of a

³ ASAC, Mexican Pavilion at the 52nd International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia, June 2007.

⁴ ASAC, FS, AV: Biennale 2009, Mexican Pavilion.

⁵ “The first participation of Mexico in the Venice Biennale goes back to 1914... Unfortunately, due to the contradictions and conflicts that the country would go through, Mexican art lost its presence in Venice for many years. During the 1950s Mexico participated on three occasions... And in a long absence of almost half a century our country participated five times more; the last three as a guest of the exhibitions of the Italo-Latin American Institute. It is not until 2007 that Mexico finally has a national pavilion” (here and after: translations by the Author).

Mexico Pavilion in any of the catalogues of the Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte della Città di Venezia before 1950. In 2013, INBA Director María Cristina García Cepeda states in the foreword for the Mexico Pavilion exhibition catalogue:

Mexican artists who have participated in the Biennale include figures of the stature of Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Rufino Tamayo, Leonora Carrington, Fernando Leal Audirac, and Gabriel Orozco. Since setting up its own pavilion in 2007, Mexico has presented artists and works of great vitality. (García Cepeda 2013, 105)

García Cepeda omits the Mexico Pavilions from 1950-1986 by distinctively mentioning Mexican artists who participated as part of the Mexico Pavilion and that have presented in collective international exhibitions within La Biennale instinctively.

In 2014, INBA Director María Cristina García Cepeda signed a contract to place the Mexico Pavilion in the Arsenale. Mexico can make use of it to exhibit diverse cultural manifestations without having to invest in restoration and paying for maintenance, assembly, damage insurance, and other third parties expenses.⁶

In 2014, García Cepeda expressed pride because, “for the first time” the Mexico Pavilion would have a spot in one of the main venues, the Arsenale, and would keep it for the following two decades.⁷ In an interview for the newspaper *La Jornada* she said:

Me parece fundamental que México esté representado dentro del circuito de la Bienal.⁸

This new opportunity to occupy a privileged space was reiterated not only to mass media and specialized journals, but also within the 2015 exhibition itself. García Cepeda states in the foreword of the catalogue of the Mexico Pavilion of 2015:

Within this new space within the official circuit of the Biennale, we have confidence in increasing the visibility of the Mexican Pavilion. (García Cepeda 2015, 37)

⁶ Sonia Ávila, “México firma convenio por 20 años en la Bienal de Venecia”, *Excélsior*, 2 de junio de 2014.

⁷ Alejandra Ortiz, “México tiene un lugar en el circuito de la Bienal de Venecia por 20 años”, *La Jornada*, 8 de junio de 2014.

⁸ “It seems fundamental for me that Mexico is represented within the main circuit of La Biennale”. María Cristina Cepeda García entrevistada en Alejandra Ortiz, “México tiene un lugar en el circuito de la Bienal de Venecia por 20 años”, *La Jornada*, 8 de junio de 2014.

In addition an important part of the artwork presented in 2015 was a cartographic retrospective of Mexico Pavilion sites, but only those from 2007-15 were included. Both the official discourse and the exhibition itself omitted all five twentieth century pavilions, four of which took place in The Giardini, the other main venue of La Biennale. In other words, the 2015 Mexico Pavilion was the first in the twenty-first century to be located in one of the two main areas (I Giardini and the Arsenale), but all of the twentieth century Mexico Pavilions shared that same honor.

The same omissions have been repeated in discourse around the 2017 Mexico Pavilion. In the Mexico Pavilion catalogue, INBA Director Lidia Camacho characterizes the pavilion as a commemoration of the first decade of Mexico's participation in La Biennale:

In 2017 Mexico celebrates the tenth anniversary with its own pavilion at La Biennale di Venezia. It was in 2007 that Rafael Lozano-Hemmer opened the doors of this venue to the arts community from Mexico, which gave him the opportunity to represent our country, through his outstanding artistic project to a broad audience. (Camacho 2017, 10)

The omissions have even been reinforced on the official webpage of the Mexico Pavilion, created by INBA and CONACULTA (<https://biennialdevenecia.mx/es/>), which includes only the Mexico Pavilions from 2007 to the present.

Knowing the importance of having a national pavilion in La Biennale, and the pride it brings to the state's cultural institutions, it is hard to believe that the individuals involved made these omissions and discrepancies on purpose. The more likely explanation is a lack of academic and institutional effort to verify the history. When scholars cite sources from 2007 onward, they are repeating the mistakes of their predecessors, reifying an inaccurate narrative. A more comprehensive history is needed. In the following sections, I bring together evidence from archival research to construct a historical narrative that includes *all* the Mexico Pavilions, organized in three phases that align with the context of their production.

3 Post-Revolutionary Nationalistic Mexico Pavilions: 1950, 1952, 1958, 1968

In the first four Mexico Pavilions presented in La Biennale di Venezia, the curatorial decisions and the aesthetic characteristics of the selected artworks were coherent, cohesive, and in accordance with the Mexican state's post-revolutionary nationalistic discourse, which was reinforced both internally and internationally. The aesthetic that came from this ideology became part of the imaginary of Mexican

art that is still present in many visual products. The post-revolutionary nationalistic discourse of this period draws on multiple threads from Mexico's history. From 1884-1911, general Porfirio Díaz Mori served seven terms as President of Mexico, developing infrastructure, bringing in foreign capital, and keeping the peace through a dictatorship that benefited the bourgeoisie while increasing economic disparity between urban and rural populations. He also supported the production of eurocentric art, especially works inspired by the French (Tenorio-Trillo 1998). The collapse of the Díaz regime led to the Mexican Revolution in 1910, which, along with the 1917 Constitution, was seen as the victorious indigenist sequel to the War of Independence (1810-1821). Together, these events liberated Mexico from imperialism and its vestiges – first from Spain, then from the imperialist countries that invaded Mexico in the nineteenth century, and finally, from the French-inspired Porfirian ideals. Consequently, Mexico in the early twentieth century was seen as a direct descendant of the Revolution and its ideals: embracing Mexico's pre-Hispanic history, racial legacy, and rural and indigenous tradition – while eschewing European aesthetics (Aguilar Camín, Meyer 1993).

In the first half of the twentieth century, the state used this post-revolutionary discourse to try to unify the country by appealing to Mexican pride. In 1947, the Mexican state founded INBA, which particularly supported arts and exhibitions aligned with this discourse, letting them flourish (Luna Arroyo 1962). The post-revolutionary ideology was widely spread in cities through public art, especially murals. This period is known as *Renacimiento Mexicano* (Mexican Renaissance). Diego Rivera (1886-1957), José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949), David Alfaro Siqueiros (1896-1974), and Rufino Tamayo (1899-1991) were the leading artists (Ugalde 2014). The movement focused on artistic media that the government supported: paintings, and wood and linoleum engravings. Artists used traditional academic techniques, but their subjects were liberated from Eurocentric canons, and instead used idealized images of pre-Hispanic history, rural peasant folklore, and popular historical images that spoke to the independent national Mexican spirit.

The images created during the Mexican Renaissance were bricks in the construction of the historic-aesthetic of Mexico. At the same time, these images integrated concepts and forms from the international avant-garde, thereby renewing the links between Mexican and western art. This movement became the seed of the *Escuela Mexicana* (Mexican School), which reiterated the same post-revolutionary subjects through the nuances of social realism until the end of the 1960s.

The first four Mexico Pavilions were presented within this political-artistic context, with artists and curators encouraged by post-revolutionary ideology. The pavilions were made during the political-economic bonanza called the 'Mexican Miracle' (1945-1970). They

included artworks from the two preferred mediums, engraving and painting (Martínez Martínez 2008). The works and artists chosen were related to the aesthetic movement of the Mexican Renaissance and the Mexican School. Just two curators were responsible for choosing, assembling, and making presentation text for the art in all four pavilions: Fernando Gamboa (1950, 1952, 1968) and Miguel Salas Azures (1956). Both were high officials of the newly formed INBA. In 1950, the first Mexico Pavilion debuted at La Biennale in an assigned space in The Giardini. It presented an exhibition curated by Fernando Gamboa, then Assistant Director of INBA. One of the most important twentieth century museographers in the history of Mexican art, Gamboa made great strides in presenting national art as a trans-historic continuum that linked pre-Hispanic art, Colonial art from 1500s-1800s, the nationalistic art of the 1800s, and post-revolutionary art. The result is an aesthetic discourse that constitutes a nationalist and indigenist image of Mexico, and has been reiterated in different venues inside and outside Mexico to this day (Molina 2013).

For the first Mexico Pavilion, Gamboa selected the best well-known artists of the Mexican Renaissance, who also started the Mexican School. These artists were committed to the state's post-revolutionary ideology, giving them access to important mural commissions from the government. The exhibition held works by the four great Mexican muralists: Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Rufino Tamayo (Biennale 25 1950). As with all his curatorial work, Gamboa's exhibition also portrayed the indigenist face of Mexico by representing pre-Hispanic myths and scenes of indigenous and rural life – all with the decolonised, figurative, and colourful character of the aesthetics of the Mexican School. This exhibition was a success for Mexico and the visibility of Mexican Art worldwide.⁹

In 1952, Mexico was once again invited to participate in La Biennale with a pavilion at The Giardini, with Gamboa curating for the second time. He presented a collection of 134 engravings by twentyfive visual artists: Ignacio Aguirre, Carlos Alvarado Lang, Luis Arenal, Avelardo Ávila, Alberto Beltrán, Angel Bracho, Federico Cantú, Fernando Castro Pacheco, José Chavez Morado, Francesco Dosamantes, Jesús Escobedo, Arturo García Bustos, Andreina Gómez, Franco Gómez Lazaro, Manuel Manilla, Leopoldo Méndez, Francisco Mora, Isidoro Ocampo, José Clemente Orozco, Paolo O'Higgins, José Guadalupe Posadas, Everardo Ramírez, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Alfredo Zalce.

Manuel Manilla and José Guadalupe Posadas were the earliest engravers of the group. They were from the same workshop, and gained wide recognition for their representations of death through cartoons

⁹ Anonymous, "México triunfa en Venecia", *Tiempo: Semanario de La Vida Y La Verdad. Ciudad de México*, junio de 1950.

of skulls in a festive mood. Posadas also did political cartoons criticizing the Porfirio Diaz government and the gap between the privileged and disadvantaged peoples. Manilla died in 1895 and Posadas in 1913 – both before the end of the Revolution – but their work inspired many Mexican artists who were engaged with post-revolutionary discourse (Crespo de la Serna 1952).

The third Mexico Pavilion, in 1958, was curated by Miguel Salas Anzures, head of INBA's visual arts department. It was located inside the central palace of La Biennale. Salas Anzures presented a collective exhibition with 18 paintings by artists described as “social realists;” disciples of Rivera, Orozco, and Siqueiros; and heirs of Mexican muralism. These artists were: Raúl Anguiano, Jorge González Camarena, Ricardo Martínez, Guillermo Meza, Carlos Orozco Romero, and Manuel Rodríguez Lozano (Biennale 29 1958).

The fourth Mexico Pavilion took place ten years later, in 1968, the same year in which the Olympics Games took place in Mexico City. Located in the central palace of La Biennale, the Mexico Pavilion was once again curated by Fernando Gamboa. It was a retrospective exhibition of Rufino Tamayo that included fifty paintings (Biennale 34 1968). According to Alejandro Uribe (2014), Tamayo's work during the 1920's, like the work of other abstract artists, did not receive support from state agencies that preferred works in the social realist style. Instead, Tamayo found economic support in the United States. The first exhibition of Tamayo's work in the United States was held at the Weyhe Gallery, New York, in 1926. His striking use of colour and the mystical way he represented Mexican folklore were key for his international success – and made the Mexican government take notice. In 1932, he received his first of many mural commissions in Mexico, to paint the National School of Music in Mexico City. He became the fourth great muralist, after Orozco, Rivera, and Siqueiros. In 1936 Tamayo moved to New York, and throughout the late thirties and early forties, the Valentine Gallery, New York, gave him shows. In 1948, Tamayo's first retrospective took place at the Instituto de Bellas Artes, Mexico City. The greatness Mexico finally saw in his work was later seen by the world at La Biennale in 1968.

4 The Rupture Pavilion: 1986

La Ruptura (The Rupture) was an artistic movement in Mexico that started in the 1950s. It included artists from different disciplines who were not favored by the state because their work was not aligned with the post-revolutionary nationalistic artistic enterprise. The movement was not formally recognized until 1988, after an art exhibition presented in the Museum Carrillo Gil called *Ruptura 1952-1965* recuperated visual works from artists who criticized, challenged, at-

tacked, and distanced themselves from the nationalist hegemonic discourse supported by the main figures of the Mexican School and its followers (Del Conde 2014).

The members of the Rupture movement did not have a cohesive aesthetic style, and they were supported by private organizations and the art market. These artists appreciated the work of the muralists, especially the adventurous art of Rufino Tamayo, as well as new developments in the European and American Art scenes. They were critical of the bureaucratic dictatorship and the 'official art' that was supported and exhibited nationally and internationally by members of the Mexican School that mimicked the themes and style of the muralists. The artists of the Rupture movement argued that even when the government patronage made life and artistic work easier, the cost of limiting the development of personal creativity and style was too high (Del Conde 1979). In 1970 the economic bubble in Mexico broke, and post-revolutionary ideology lost its power. Artists from the Rupture movement who had been excluded from the institutional circuit in Mexico started appearing in official venues. This was especially true for those who found recognition and better markets for their artworks outside Mexico.

Throughout the 1970s, the Mexico Pavilion was absent from La Biennale. It reappeared in 1986, the same year that the World Cup was held in Mexico, thereby affording Mexico another opportunity for increased visibility in the international arena. The curator Sara Bolaño was in charge of presenting the Mexico Pavilion in the Arsenale. This was the first time Mexico presented artists that were not attached to the Mexican School. The exhibition included 10 engravings and one painting by Manuel Felguerez, and 10 paintings by Raymundo Sesma. As part of the Rupture movement, neither artist was supported by the state in their early careers; their work was too 'abstract' and therefore unable to convey the post-revolutionary ideology relied on so heavily by the social realists. However, they found good markets for their work in Europe, particularly in France and Italy. When the Mexican government later declared itself to be open to art outside of the Mexican School, Felguerez, and Sesma got support and recognition inside Mexico (García Gomez 2009).

In the catalogue of the XLII Esposizione Internazionale La Biennale di Venezia, Bolaño includes text written by 1990 Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz as the foreword of the Mexico Pavilion.¹⁰ Paz states that:

Il nuovo muralismo di Felguérez ha rotto con la tradizione della scuola messicana... Gli anni di consolidamento del regime nato dalla rivoluzione messicana (1930-1945) furono anche quelli della gra-

¹⁰ This essay was published for the first time in the catalogue of the exhibition *Espacio Multiple* [Multiple Space] at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City in 1973 (1-7).

duale divisione delle correnti universali nella sfera dell'arte e della letteratura. Alla fine di questo periodo il paese tornò a chiudersi in sé stesso ed il movimento artistico e poetico, originariamente fecondo, degenerò in un nazionalismo accademico, non meno asfissiante e sterile dell'europeismo di Porfirio Diaz. I primi a ribellarsi furono i poeti e, quasi immediatamente, seguirono i romanzieri ed i pittori. Tra il 1950 ed il 1960 la generazione di Felguérez... iniziò un lavoro di pulizia estetica e mentale. (Paz in Biennale 42 1986)¹¹

This text is representative of the commonalities of the Rupture movement: criticizing the constraints of the hegemonic Mexican School and praising the work of Felguerez as being able to break away from it. After the four first pavilions that proudly supported and reinforced the aesthetic of the social realism reproduced by the Mexican School, the Mexico Pavilion of 1986 presented the result of its decline as dominant style.

5 The Transnational Pavilions: 2007, 2009, 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017

After another long absence of 20 years, the Mexico Pavilion reappeared in 2007. Since then, the Mexico Pavilion has been present at each consecutive Biennale. These are the 'transnational' pavilions because they share common characteristics with what Nestor García Canclini (2014, 21) calls the globalized art system of the twenty-first century.

While the twentieth century Mexico Pavilions attempted to represent a national Mexican artistic identity, the twenty-first century translational pavilions have worked to create cross-border relations and multicultural alliances. This change is also reflected in the presentation texts. Exhibitions prior to 2007 describe a Mexican cultural essence. From 2007 on, supporting texts explain how the exhibitions contribute to the global art system, highlighting concepts that relate to social and cultural concerns across nations.

The exhibitions in the twentieth century were curated by INBA officials. In the twenty-first century, INBA has had a more managerial role, organizing a contest with an external jury. Curators submit pro-

¹¹ "Felguérez's muralism broke with the tradition of the Mexican School... A gradual division of the universal movements in the art and literature spheres occurred in the years when the political regime that was born from the Mexican Revolution was consolidating (1930-1945). At the end of this period [Mexico] closed itself again and the artistic and poetic movement... degenerated into an academic nationalism, none less suffocating and sterile than Porfirio Diaz Europeism. The first who rebelled were the poets followed almost immediately by the novelists and the painters. Between 1950 and 1960, Felguerez's generation... started an aesthetic and mental cleaning".

posals, and the winning project becomes the Mexico Pavilion for La Biennale. This effectively shifts power away from the Mexican state and towards the curators, who can work with artists to bring their transnational concerns and identity to the exhibition.

The artists and curators chosen for the transnational Mexico Pavilions have lived, worked, and presented their art in different nations. This is manifested in the way they fluidly incorporate codes from different cultures, rework their local traditions, insert them significantly into a transnational exchange, and sell their work in cities around the world. Additionally, transnational art enhances what Arthur Danto (2009) calls post-historic art, in which painting is no longer the main platform as it was in the first half of the twentieth century. Instead, transdisciplinary practices prevail; it is no longer necessary for the artist to work solely in one medium. While all the twentieth century Mexico Pavilions presented painting and engraving, all the twenty-first century exhibitions have embraced multimedia approaches, including installation, interactive art, performance, object art, video, photography, and sound art.

In 2007, officials from La Biennale and INBA agreed that the Mexico Pavilion would be held in the gothic Soranzo Van Axel Palace, one of the venues outside of the main circuit of La Biennale. The pavilion presented the exhibition *Algunas cosas pasan más veces que todo el tiempo* (*Some things happen more times than all the time*). Curated by Priamo Lozada and Bárbara Perea, the show included six art installations created by the Mexican artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer.

Lozano-Hemmer is a transnational artist: he has lived, studied, worked, and presented his work in different countries. Raised in Mexico, he studied physics and chemistry at Concordia University in Montreal, Canada, where he has lived since 1990. In his career as a visual artist, he explores science and technology through interactive installations; kinetic sculptures; and public space interventions using video projections, sound, photographs, internet connections, and sensors. Perhaps the highlight of his works in the 2007 Mexico Pavilion, the installation *Almacén de Corazonadas* (*Pulse Room*) consists of a hundred light bulbs that turn on and off according to the heartbeat of different spectators as they touched two sensors.¹² The exhibition aimed to generate an embodied experience around

the paradoxical phenomenon found in certain scientific fields, such as quantum physics, where prediction and uncertainty models have proven the existence of behaviours that happen more often than one hundred percent of the time. (Lozada, Perea 2007)

¹² Germaine Gómez Haro, "México en la Bienal de Venecia", *La Jornada Semanal*, 2 de septiembre de 2007.

Instead of any attempt of portray a national identity, the curators and the artist presented a universal concept pulled from physics.

The 2009 Mexico Pavilion held an exhibition titled *¿De qué otra cosa podríamos hablar?* (*What else could we talk about?*), with work of the Mexican artist Teresa Margolles. The show was curated by Cuahutemoc Medina and situated in the Renaissance building of the Rota Ivancich Palace, a space built in the 16th century, located near to St. Mark's Square and out of the main circuit of La Biennale. Margolles' work comments on the thousands of deaths that occurred in Mexico in relation to the war against narcotraffic, which began in 2007 under President Felipe Calderón.¹³ In the installation *Lemas (Mottos)*, a set of sheets is completely stained with blood collected from the floor of a 2008 violent crime scene is embroidered with phrases related to drug-violence in golden thread. In the performance *Limpieza (Cleaning)*, relatives of people who were murdered in drug trafficking conflicts mop the floor of the exhibition space with a mixture of water and fluids from the morgue. Margolles and Medina requested that the exhibition space not be cleaned, so the surrounding decay became part of the artworks, adding to the spectator's sense exposure to repulsion, hatred, and pain.¹⁴ In the catalogue for La Biennale 2009, Medina frames these artworks with a transnational appeal:

Margolles' work carefully balances the fear of contamination, the social need for political awareness, to a crisis which is yet another of the faces of globalization. The works presented at the Mexican Pavilion are subtle chronicle of the effect of a devilish international economy: the vicious circle of prohibition, addiction, accumulation, poverty, hatred, and repression that transmogrifies the transgressive pleasures and puritan obsession of the North into the South as Hell. (Biennale 53 2009, 90)

Here Medina presents the exhibition as a political piece, criticising the socio-economic inequalities that negatively affect nations around the world. It connects the Mexico Pavilion with broader problems occurring in the transnational scene.

¹³ There was a controversy around this exhibition. As it was a direct critique to the President decision, and portrayed a negative image of Mexico, the Secretary of Foreign Affairs (SRE) attempted to stop the INBA to produce it. The SRE even cancelling funds had been destined to support the pavilion was going to had. The decision of the jury and cultural public opinion, which generally leans towards a liberal-progressive position, won the battle, the exhibition was presented, portraying an idea of Mexican State as open to critic and freedom of speech (Villanueva Rivas 2014).

¹⁴ Alejandra Ortiz Castañeda, "Por la violencia, 'México es un país que llora': Teresa Margolles", *La Jornada*, 11 de junio de 2009.

In 2011, Melanie Smith was selected to exhibit her work for the Mexico Pavilion at the Rota Ivancich Palace. She is an intercultural border-crossing artist: she is British, has lived in Mexico since 1989, and became a naturalized Mexican citizen in 2006. The exhibition titled *Cuadro Rojo, Imposible Rosa (Red Square, Impossible Pink)*, included an installation, expanded paintings, and a short version of three of Smith's videos: *Azteca Stadium: malleable prowess* (2010), *Xilitla* (2010), and *Bulk* (2011). The curator of the exhibition, Jose Luis Barrios (2011), situates Smith's videos in discourse on the globally fractured concept of modernity. He states that Smith's analyzes the way in which modernities are placed outside the hegemonic power and how they are interpreted outside this space that we consider modernity (Barrios 2011, 15-21).

In other works for the pavilion, Smith incorporated disaggregated images from Latin American social symbols, in order to question the political condition of modernization by creating the kind of disjointed narratives that post-colonized nations share.

The 2013 Mexico Pavilion exhibition was presented in the former San Lorenzo Church and curated by Itala Schmelz. Under the title *Cordiox*, it consisted of one piece from the artist Ariel Guzik, whose work has been shown internationally. Guzik is a musician, scientist, and visual artist who has dedicated three decades of research to creating devices that can detect sound waves imperceptible to the human ear and translate them into audible sound. His goal has been to be able to hear and communicate with plants, and animals, with a special focus on marine life. *Cordiox* is a complex, four-meter tall machine that uses a quartz system sensitive to electromagnetic fields and converts those fields into sound waves. The acoustics of the church made the space function as a resonance box into which the spectators could penetrate and be surrounded by the unrecognizable sound.¹⁵ The Mexico Pavilion catalogue of 2013 states that Guzik's work:

poses a science without pragmatic ends which explores the living planet... it fosters and enriches a debate that is currently on the agenda worldwide. As the development of our species has become a serious threat to nature, contemporary individuals have detached themselves, through urbanization, from their natural surroundings. In the face of this situation, Guzik invites us to reestablish a dialogue with the planet. (Schmelz 2013, 111)

The unrepeatable and uncomparable experience of hearing and moving through the sound of the building was the strength of the piece. As this quote shows, the piece also appealed to global concerns as the other transnational exhibitions do.

¹⁵ Oscar Cid de León, "Alistan viaje de 'Cordiox'". *Público*, 16 de mayo de 2013.

The 2015 Mexico Pavilion also presented a one-piece exhibition titled *Possessing Nature*. It was curated by Karla Jasso and created jointly by the Mexican neo-conceptual artists Tania Candiani and Luis Felipe Ortega, who have worked and shown in a number of countries around the globe. Both artists work with installations, machines, interventions, and videos regarding the relation between artefacts, language, culture, and space. For the Mexico Pavilion, their work aimed to show different relations between Venice and Mexico City as “amphibian” lake cities (Jasso 2015). The installation pulls associations with drainage and lagoons into conversation with the emplaced history of Mexico Pavilions. It consists of a three-meter high metallic structure which looks like a serpentine wall in an irregular and angled zig-zag, and works as a hydraulic artefact. Water brought from Venice’s lagoon circulates over the wall in a narrow canal; the running water fills the space with its sound. At one end of the structure, a contained pool of water lays on the floor, making a screen. Black and white photographs from Mexico City and Venice are projected onto the surface, overlapping to enhance the similarities between the two cities. The path of the wall over the floor traces a cartographic retrospective of the places where the Mexico Pavilion has been presented from 2007-15. In La Biennale, *Possessing Nature* provided a critical view of power dynamics in the history of urbanism, which is shared globally in westernized cities.

In 2017, the Mexico Pavilion presented the exhibition *La vida en los pliegues (The Life in the Folds)* by the artist Carlos Amoraes, curated by Pablo León de la Barra. Amoraes’ work combines the imaginaries of contemporary subculture, traditional crafts, popular culture, and conceptual art. Carlos Amoraes lives in Mexico, studied in Amsterdam in the Rijkskasacademies Van Beeldende Kunsten (1992-1995) and in the Gerrit Rietveld Academie (1996-1997), and has completed artistic residencies in France and the United States (León de la Barra 2017). The exhibition consisted of a set of artefacts related to a code created by Amoraes. Each letter of the alphabet corresponds to the abstract shape of a black ocarina, a small wind instrument, and the sound it produces. The ocarinas are displayed over white tables as texts, and the tables are surrounded by a set of images and a video called *The cursed village*. The video uses black paper figures and shadow theatre to tell a story of a family of immigrants who were lynched. The characters ‘speak’ the code of the ocarinas’ sound. The video has subtitles for the dialogue that is displayed using the visual code of the abstract shapes. In the wall text, Amoraes explains:

I believe we are in a time when it is crucial to discuss freedom of thought if we want... understanding of equality and justice. I’ve research the way in which writing is encrypted... as a strategy to preserve contents that would be silenced if they were in legible

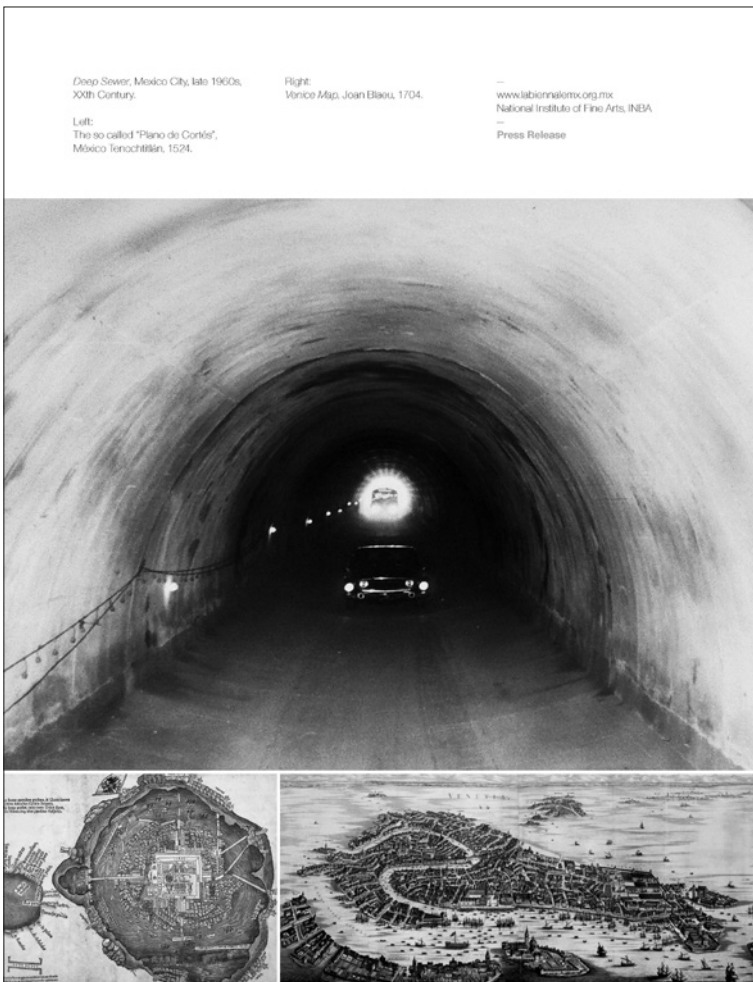


Figure 2 Tania Candiani and Luis Felipe Ortega, *Possessing Nature*, Pavilion of Mexico at the 56th International Art Exhibition of La Biennale di Venezia, 2015 (press kit)

form... In this piece, images of migration and lynching are metaphors of a generalized crisis that we need to discuss. On the one hand migration is the consequence of current economic policies... On the other murders... carried out by citizens and private militias... where people administer justice subjectively.¹⁶

Amorales presents her work as able to speak on and critique global economic disparities and incoherences. It is a relational piece that is tied to a wider argument about global social practices.

6 Concluding Thoughts

In this chapter, I have attempted to do a revision to the history of the Mexico Pavilion in La Biennale di Venezia. I did this by first, supplying evidence that discrepancies and omissions about the history of the Mexico Pavilion have been published and reiterated since 2007 up to today; then, by presenting the results of an investigation that clarify this history, through a narrative that groups the Mexico Pavilions according to the commonalities of their exhibitions, and situates each group within the Mexican Art context.

Mexico Pavilions fall into three categories: post-revolutionary nationalist (1950, 1952, 1958, 1968), rupture (1986), and transnational (2007-17). The first group is characterized by the inclusion of artists from the Mexican School who were supported by the Mexican state. As part of the state's ideological enterprise, artworks embraced the aesthetics of social realism to create a unified Mexican identity - one that celebrated the ideals of the 1910 Revolution and a common pre-Hispanic ethnicity. The second group included abstract, bidimensional works by artists who rejected the hegemony of the Mexican School and could not be nationally recognized until the decline of the post-revolutionary state. The third group of Pavilions is shaped by consecutive appearances in La Biennale, each presenting exhibitions less interested in presenting a national art identity. The artists in these pavilions are already part of the transnational art circuit, and use non traditional media to discuss concepts that speak to concerns about the globalized world.

This chapter presents a stable ground for future research about the Mexico Pavilions. I hope that this work will help recognize the ef-

¹⁶ This quote was taken from the text wall of the exhibition *La vida en los pliegues* [Life in the folds] curated by Pablo León de la Barra with the artwork of Carlos Amorales, and presented in the Mexico Pavilion at *La Biennale di Venezia* (2017). The text was signed by the artist.

forts involved in the exhibitions of the twentieth century that have been omitted reiteratively in the twenty-first century. These omissions inadvertently diminish the strength and appreciation that Mexican Art has had in the international scene. Moreover, we cannot truly understand the evolution of themes, aesthetic values, and artistic movements that have represented Mexican Art to the world if we do not acknowledge the complete historical record of the Mexico Pavilions in La Biennale di Venezia.

Table 1 Schematic representation of the chronology of the presence of the Mexico Pavilion in the Esposizione Internazionale D'Arte la Biennale di Venezia. It includes for each pavilion its year, location, curator, exhibition title, and artist that were presented.

	Year	Location	Curator	Exhibition Title	Artists
Post-revolutionary nationalistic pavilion	1950	I Giardini	Fernando Gamboa	-	Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, Rufino Tamayo
	1952	I Giardini	Fernando Gamboa	-	Ignacio Aguirre, Carlos Alvarado Lang, Luis Arenal, Avelardo Ávila, Alberto Beltrán, Angel Bracho, Federico Cantú, Fernando Castro Pacheco, José Chavez Morado, Francisco Dosamantes, Jesús Escobedo, Arturo García Bustos, Andreina Gómez, Franco Gómez Lazaro, Manuel Manilla, Leopoldo Méndez, Francisco Mora, Isidoro Ocampo, José Clemente Orozco, Paolo O'Higgins, José Guadalupe Posadas, Everardo Ramírez, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Alfredo Zalce
	1958	Padiglione Centrale La Biennale, i Giardini	Miguel Salas Anzures	-	Raúl Anguiano, Jorge Gonzáles Camarena, Ricardo Martínez, Guillermo Meza, Carlos Orozco Romero, and Manuel Rodríguez Lozano
	1968	Padiglione Centrale La Biennale, i Giardini	Fernando Gamboa	-	Rufino Tamayo
The Rupture Pavilion	1986	Arsenale	Sara Bolaño	-	Manuel Felguerez, Raymundo Sesma
Transnational Pavilions	2007	Palazzo Soranzo Van Axel	Priamo Lozada and Barbara Perea	<i>Algunas cosas pasan más veces que todo el tiempo.</i> [Some Things Happen More Often Than All of the Time]	Rafael Lozano-Hemmer
	2009	Palazzo Rota Ivancich	Cuauhtémoc Medina	<i>¿De qué otra cosa podríamos hablar?</i> [What else can we talk about?]	Teresa Margolles
	2011	Palazzo Rota Ivancich	Jose Luis Barrios	<i>Cuadro rojo impossible rosa</i> [Red Square Impossible Pink]	Melanie Smith
	2013	ex-chiesa di San Lorenzo	Itala Schmelz	<i>Cordiox</i>	Ariel Guzik
	2015	Arsenale	Karla Jasso	<i>Possessing Nature</i>	Tania Candiani and Luis Felipe Ortega
	2017	Arsenale	Pablo León de la Barra	<i>La vida en los pliegues</i> [Life in the folds]	Carlos Amoraes

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