

# Art research collections in Mexico City

*Gabriela Betsabé Miramontes Vidal*

**R**esearch collections in art reflect, in part, the cultural and artistic activities of a country and by themselves constitute a heritage. Two of the most important research collections in Mexico for arts are in the custody of the Institute of Aesthetic Research (IIE) of the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and the Library of Arts (BA) of the National Center for the Arts (CENART, Ministry of Culture). This paper gives an overview of these collections to expose their relevance and the potential they offer for research in the arts.

## Introduction

The research collections specializing in art in Mexico are vast. There are both public and private collections with broad research scopes preserved in libraries, archives and museums. Researchers and the general public can consult everything from books to hand programs and sheet music through a wide variety of multimedia formats. This paper deals with the research collections of the Institute of Aesthetic Research (IIE) and the Library of Arts (BA). I was fortunate enough to work in both collections in the past and know them very well. Of course, there are many more art collections in the broad cultural panorama of the country, and I will briefly refer to some of them as well.

## Aesthetic Research Institute

The Aesthetic Research Institute was founded in 1935 under the name *UNAM Art Laboratory* under the direction of Manuel Toussaint. A year later it would be elevated to the category of Institute. Many years have passed since then, as well as many great masters of art history such as Justino Fernández, Francisco de la Maza, Beatriz de la Fuente, Clementina Díaz y de Ovando, José Alberto Manrique, Teresa del Conde, Elisa Vargas Lugo and Eduardo Báez, among others. Each of them laid the methodological and theoretical foundations of the history of art in Mexico. Their prolific research work is reflected in the various documents that they published which are now reference sources for teaching and research.

The Institute provides the necessary environment and conditions for the custody of these publications – over time, the research collections have increased to support the academic work of its researchers. The collections are grouped into the following areas: Justino Fernández Library, Beatriz de la Fuente Library, Manuel Toussaint Photographic Archive, Eduardo Báez Macías Historical and Documentary Research Archive and recently, the Information Unit for the Arts (UNIARTE).

Each of these departments has a history and a mission of commitment to the documents it safeguards.

The two libraries belong to the library system of the National Autonomous University of Mexico, and as such they are governed by its acquisition and cataloguing policies to feed the collective library catalogue of the University (<https://www.dgb.unam.mx/>). However, collection development for both libraries is determined by selections made by and for the researchers of the institute itself in attention to its seven research areas: indigenous art in America, Viceregal art, modern art, contemporary art, theory of art, world art, and studies on techniques and materials.



Fig. 1. Institute of Aesthetic Research, UNAM, Gerardo Vázquez Miranda. 2020. Image courtesy of the Manuel Toussaint Photographic Archive.

### *The Justino Fernández Library*

The Justino Fernández Library currently has a collection of approximately 57,000 books, 58,000 issues of specialized magazines, and 20,000 documents in special art collections. It was originally formed through book donations made in 1935 by the Seville Art Laboratory and other Spanish institutions such as the Prado Museum and the Don Juan Institute. Later, through the establishment of the acquisition by exchange with universities and national and international art research institutions, the collection grew.<sup>1</sup>

Special mention should be made of the collections of art exhibition catalogs and of brochures, as well as the historical collection. The exhibition catalogs reflect the intense activity of museums and galleries in the 20th century, mainly in Mexico City. This material documents individual and group exhibitions, including Gilberto Aceves Navarro, Manuel Álvarez Bravo, Juan García Ponce, Rufino Tamayo, Francisco Toledo, Juan Soriano, among other artists. The brochure collection includes publications from the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty first centuries, and are documents ranging from one to 50 pages on various events related to art. For example, there are the catalogs of the Exhibitions of the National School of Fine Arts (formerly known as the San Carlos Academy of Noble Arts); printed pamphlets from the most representative Mexican publishers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as works by Francisco Díaz de León. In Special Collections are books published from the seventeenth to the twentieth century on engravings, sculpture, architecture, theater, iconology, as well as facsimile editions of pre-Hispanic codices. The historical collection and some artists' books are concentrated in this area. There is also a copy of each book published under the editorial seal of the Institute itself, numbering around a thousand titles.

### *The Beatriz de la Fuente Library*

The Beatriz de la Fuente Library is located in the Oaxaca Extension Center, in the city of the same name. The original collection of this library is the personal art book collection of Dr. de la Fuente, which she bequeathed to the Institute upon her death. This library numbers around 6,000 volumes. In addition, it houses the Olivier Debroise collection with more than 2,000 titles in a bibliographic collection selected by the art critic. The collection includes facsimiles of pre-Hispanic codices, as well as books by and about Mexican artists such as Gerardo Murillo, Dr. Atl, and a selection of books on photography and literature, as well as art criticism in Latin America, among many other topics.

### *The Manuel Toussaint Photographic Archive*

The Manuel Toussaint Photographic Archive has a collection of more than one million photographic images of art in different media and formats. The creation of

1. Carmen Block, 'Origin and relevance of the collections that make up the library of the Institute of Aesthetic Research,' in *A memory of 75 years. 1935–2010: the Institute of Aesthetic Research*, 177.

this archive is due to the then director of the Institute, Manuel Toussaint, who saw the need to gather the images that researchers had collected for their studies in an effort to document Mexican art.<sup>2</sup> The Archive promoted the photographic documentation of archaeological importance or sites of artistic and cultural interest, as well as of museums. The slide collection of around 470,000 images records the Mexican artistic heritage and for many years was used to support teaching and research. Highlights of the Archive include the black and white photograph collection as well as those of photographers such as Luis Márquez Romay, Julio Michaud, Guillermo Kahlo, Tina Modotti, José María Lupercio, Juan Guzmán, Enrique Bordes Mangel, José Verde Orive and Michel Zabé, or the legacies of Manuel Toussaint, Abelardo Carrillo y Gariel, Justino Fernández, Francisco de la Maza, Paul Gendrop, and Manuel González Galván.<sup>3</sup>

Modernity came to the archive in 1979 with the hiring of academic staff in charge of area services. In 1986 with the change of the institute to the current facilities, the vault of the photo library was enlarged to protect its special collections. In the twentieth century, cataloging and digitization are daily activities in the archive and are carried out under international standards.<sup>4</sup>

### *The Eduardo Báez Macías Historical Documentary Research Archive*

The Eduardo Báez Macías Historical and Documentary Research Archive began its activity as a support area for research projects in 1975. The archive's primary work was the location, transcription and paleography of documents related to Mexican art located in other archives such as the General Archive of the Nation and that of Notaries of Mexico City – this work was published in 1982 in the *Catalogs of Art Documents*.<sup>5</sup> With the advent of information technologies in the archives and several donated research collections of important figures in the history of art in Mexico, the activities of the Archive have pivoted. Along with consulting the archives mentioned, the Archives has taken on the task of cataloging its own research collections. Currently, the personal files of Justino Fernández, Beatriz de la Fuente, Salvador Moreno, Jorge Alberto Manrique, among others, are in the process of being put online for consultation.

### *Information Unit for the Arts (UNIARTE)*

Research collections endure thanks to the cataloging and digitization processes they receive in the institutions that safeguard them, but they also require new forms of access to link them to current modes of research. As a result of the complexity involved in cataloging cultural objects, in 2012, the IIE saw the need to implement the Information Unit for the Arts (UNIARTE), where best practices are analyzed and implemented for the cataloging, documentation and publication of scientific cultural data, as well as the use of international standards to create linked open data (LOD) formats.

Each of the departments of the IIE uses the appropriate cataloging standards in accordance with the type of documents it safeguards. Thus, the libraries use MARC format with RDA; the Photographic Archive catalogues its materials in Collective Access according to VRA standards while the Documentary Research Archive adheres to ISAD G rules.

### **National Center for the Arts**

Located in the southern part of Mexico City, the National Center for the Arts (CENART) was opened in 1994. It is a cultural complex that covers 12 hectares of land developed comprehensively by the architects: Ricardo Legorreta, Teodoro González de León, Enrique Norten, Luis Vicente Flores, Javier Calleja, Alfonso López Baz and Javier Sordo Madaleno.<sup>6</sup>

CENART concentrates the four research centers of the National Institute of Fine Arts and Literature (INBAL): the José Limón National Center for Research, Documentation and Information on Dance; the Rodolfo Usigli National Center for Research, Documentation and Theater Information; the Carlos Chávez National Center for Research, Documentation and Musical Information; and the National Center for Research, Documentation and Information on Plastic Arts. As well as the four schools, the National School of Theatrical Art; the National School of Classical and Contemporary Dance; the La Esmeralda National School of

2. Elisa Vargaslugo and Cecilia Gutiérrez, 'The Manuel Toussaint Photographic Archive,' in *A memory of 75 years. 1935–2010: the Institute of Aesthetic Research*, 185.

3. 'Manuel Toussaint Photographic Archive', <http://www.esteticas.unam.mx/afmt>

4. Cecilia Gutiérrez, 'Modernization and consolidation of the Manuel Toussaint Photographic Archive,' in *A memory of 75 years. 1935–2010: the Institute of Aesthetic Research*, 194 and 195.

5. Julieta Ortiz Gaytán, 'The Documentary Research Department', in *A memory of 75 years. 1935–2010: the Institute of Aesthetic Research*, 201.

6. 'National Center for the Arts,' <https://www.cenart.gob.mx/cenart-2/>

Painting, Sculpture and Engraving; the Higher School of Music; and the Cinematographic Training Center. The entire complex has ten scenic spaces, multiple galleries and green areas and includes the Multimedia Center and the Arts Library.

### *Arts Library*

The Library of the Arts was designed by the architect Ricardo Legorreta and is projected across an area of three thousand square meters on two levels,<sup>7</sup> initially housing around 170,000 books, the collection currently numbers almost 800,000. The library's original collection comes from the collections and archives gathered by the four INBAL research centers as part of their research work throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

7. *Library of the Arts* [pamphlet]. Mexico: National Center for the Arts, 1997.



Fig. 2. Library of the Arts, National Center for the Arts, Lourdes Cruz González Franco. Image courtesy of the Manuel Toussaint Photographic Archive.

The collections have been augmented by a collection development program aimed at supporting research and teaching in the arts. Currently they are made up of 32 types of research materials, among which are the artists' books such as those of Jorge Juan Crespo de la Serna, Esperanza Iris, Angélica Morales von Sauer, Armando de María y Campos, Nancy Cárdenas and Henrietta Yurchenco, in addition to INBAL's own administrative files. Within the research collection, in addition to books and magazines, plans and scores can be consulted including documents from the personal collection of the conductor Eduardo Mata.

As in any library, the documents are grouped by type into different departments. The departments of Special Collections and the Sound and Video Library stand out, where it is possible to consult unique materials including the open reel recordings of the composer and musician Manuel Enríquez.

Special Collections is located on the lower level of the library and, like the Sound and Video Library, has controlled humidity and temperature conditions for the materials stored there – mainly rare, old, or unique documents. The photographic collection numbers around 230,000 images in different formats and housings, the largest of which is the collection of printed photography, mostly in black and white. Also preserved in this area are some instrument specimens and the scores and prizes of the pianist Angélica Morales von Sauer, as well as a unique copy of the score of Verdi's *Nebuchadnezzar* (1842) and the personal belongings of the playwright Rodolfo Usigli. The photographic collection of the history of dance includes almost 12,000 images of dance performances.

The collection of playbills and invitations, approximately 52,000 items, deserves special mention. In it is the playbill for *The Suspicious Truth* with which the Palace of Fine Arts opened in 1934, as well as the playbill for the world premiere of the symphonic work *Huapango* by the Mexican composer José Pablo Moncayo performed by the Mexico Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Carlos Chávez.

In addition to these two institutions, there are other important art research collections in Mexico. The University Libraries and Archives of the Faculties of Architecture and Design Arts, which preserves the research collections of the Academy of San Carlos, and the Arkheia Documentation Center of the University Museum of Contemporary Art (MUAC). Outside the university sphere, the collections belonging to the library of the Franz Mayer Museum, the library of the National Museum of Art (MUNAL), the documentation center of the Cineteca Nacional, the documentation center and the library of the Alvar y Carmen Museum Carrillo Gil, the library of the National Museum of San Carlos, and the library of the JUMEX Foundation all house important art research collections.

## Conclusion

Mexico, like other countries in the world, has an unquantifiable amount of cultural heritage materials. A small part is located in museums and cultural institutions, where the registration of each object generates documentation for research, conservation and consultation. Without the aforementioned institutions, these tasks would be impossible. There is a lot of work ahead, but making use of digital technologies for best practices in the cataloguing of collections is a duty and an opportunity. This paper illuminates only a small sample of the documentary wonder of Mexico and only a portion of the institutions that organize, preserve and disseminate them.

I would like to thank my colleagues Claudia Jasso (Citru), Marcia Salas and Celia Licona from the Library of the Arts, and Ricardo Alvarado, Gerardo Vázquez and Catalina Hernández from the Manuel Toussaint Photographic Archive.

---

Gabriela Betsabé Miramontes Vidal  
Academic of UNIARTE  
Institute of Aesthetic Research, UNAM  
Circuit Mario de la Cueva  
University City  
Mexico  
Email: [gbetsabe@unam.mx](mailto:gbetsabe@unam.mx)

## References

- Arciniega, Hugo and Arturo Pascual. *A memory of 75 years. 1935–2010: The Institute of Aesthetic Research*, Mexico: UNAM, Institute of Aesthetic Research.  
*Library of the Arts* [pamphlet]. Mexico: National Center for the Arts, 199?.
- 'Manuel Toussaint Photographic Archive,' Institute of Aesthetic Research, accessed October 1, 2022. <http://www.esteticas.unam.mx/afmt>
- 'National Center for the Arts,' CENART, accessed October 10, 2022. <https://www.cenart.gob.mx/cenart-2/>