

Elżbieta Żuławska-Sobczyk, MSc Eng. Arch.

Abstract of the doctoral dissertation entitled: 'Pre-Columbian motifs in 20th-century Mexican architecture'

Mexico is a country with a rich history, where, in a setting of rich nature, two radically different cultures met in 1519 and, intermingling through a process of cultural mestizo, created a modern country that seeks to follow the spirit of the times. To this day, there is a dualistic approach to national roots. On the one hand, pride in the richness of pre-Columbian cultures; on the other, a pejorative contemporary attitude towards what is 'Indian' as a symbol of regression. On the one hand, hatred of the European invaders, on the other, aspiration to the lifestyle led by the people of the so-called Western World. It is these contradictions that make up the richness of the current Mexican national identity.

The difficult process of birthing a single nation from these two disparate worlds continues to this day, but for the last hundred and fifty years or so this process has taken a formalized shape, reflected in architecture, among other things. At the end of the nineteenth century, Mexican power circles began to consciously influence the process of shaping the national culture through political and cultural pressure. Concepts and approaches changed over the years, but the goal remained the same: to inspire a sense of national unity and pride in society while creating an image internationally of a nation rich in culture. One of the most important elements of this process was pride in the heritage of pre-Columbian times and the idea of creating a new national identity based on these origins.

The aim of this study was to find manifestations of this process in twentieth-century Mexican architecture. Familiarization with the broader architectural context has made it possible to extract a dozen or so examples from among a larger body of work that show the path in which the process of the interpenetration of pre-Columbian cultures within twentieth-century architecture took place. The research identified which cultural elements from pre-Columbian times permeated into the present day and which did not, and what impact they had on the emerging sense of national identity of Mexicans. The research identified three ways in which historical elements were adapted into contemporary architectural works. The most thoroughly researched and chronological first path was the creation of the so-called "neo" styles. At the end of the 19th century, architects largely attempted to apply historical styles to contemporary buildings. This gave rise to the Neo-Aztec, Neo-Mayan or Neo-Toltec styles.

What they had in common was the transfer of historical architectural elements directly from 19th- to 20th-century buildings. Another group is made up of objects that are closely related to the time in which they were created but refer to archaeological periods. Here we are dealing with a group within which there is a great deal of variation in terms of the processing of inspiration. It is to this group that most of the present work is devoted. The third group is made up of objects that refer to historical times through folklore and vernacular. Folk culture and art are full of relics of the past, which refer by their tradition and character to pre-Columbian times, but their contemporary form is transformed by years of adaptation to the current situation. In this way, folklore has become an inspiration for contemporary artists.

The thesis of the work is that Mexican architects drew on the work of pre-Columbian cultures in their works, thus contributing to the Mexican national identity that was emerging in the 20th century.

Keywords

Mexican architecture, regionalism, 20th century architecture, Latin American architecture, pre-Columbian architecture in the 20th century, Mexican monuments

Elbicka Zuluaska-Solnyk