

Course Syllabus

[Jump to Today](#)

Modern Architecture in Mexico: From the Euphoria of Transparency to the Canonization of Color, 1945-1976

With the close of the Second World War, Mexican architects and thinkers developed an architecture that both reinforced and challenged their strong cultural identity and legacy and that dealt squarely with the globalizing and homogenizing forces of modernity. The positive economic outlook, dubbed as the “Mexican miracle,” encouraged and promoted the state to undertake large public works programs –from infrastructure to education, nation building, and housing, to name a few. Many of these were seen as continuing the social project engendered by the Mexican revolution of 1910-1920 as well as the cultural and architectural investigations that followed it. However, instead of searching for particular architectural languages that could be deployed as a means to address the population and its needs –characteristic of the first half of the twentieth century– many architects focused more on the internationalization of architecture and on contemporary debates centered on the transforming role of modern architecture.

The adaptation to Mexican sensibilities continued to be an important concern for architects and planners who aspired to modernize –and express the modernization of– the country. While the state was the central promoter of this, it was the experimentations with new materials and industrial products that would reflect these tendencies within the development of new office buildings, private residences, and public spaces in Mexico City, the locus of many of these transformations. The state was also intent on promoting a modernity, both in Mexico and abroad, which was tempered by its history and traditions through a monumental architecture that reinforced its image and values. The political debates of the mid- to end- of the 1960s reflected the important role it had in transforming architectural production and the use of public space: characterized by the 1968 Olympic games, the student uprisings that preceded them, and their violent suppression. Despite Mexico’s stabilized development following the Second World War, it began to suffer economic problems that were exacerbated by growing public debt. It was in the mid-1970s that a certain line of architectural development emerged which gained international momentum through the mythification of what was to be considered as the essence and clearest expression of “Mexican” architecture, chiefly under the auspices of Luis Barragán.

This aim of this course is to introduce students to the artistic, social, political, economic, and historical complexities that frame Mexico’s post-war rich architectural production; centered primarily on the role of the state, material and typological experimentations, and the transformation and “Mexicanization” of modern architecture. Through examples –some well known and canonical and others that are overlooked in traditional scholarship– the narratives of architecture discussed will provide expressions to how those complexities articulated themselves in architecture, planning, and the publication, artistic, and decorative projects that supported them. While the class’ focus is on work produced in twentieth century Mexico, we will carefully look at precedents, debates, and productions that produced the various architectural works including discussions on plastic integration, international stylistic cross-pollination (such as the effects of the (new) international style both in Europe and South America), and the influences of changing and defining political wills.