

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

FMF-29

Mexico: Stone, steel, wood, stucco and glass

Mexico, D.F.

17 June 1969

Richard H. Nolte, Executive Director  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
535 Fifth Avenue  
New York, New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:

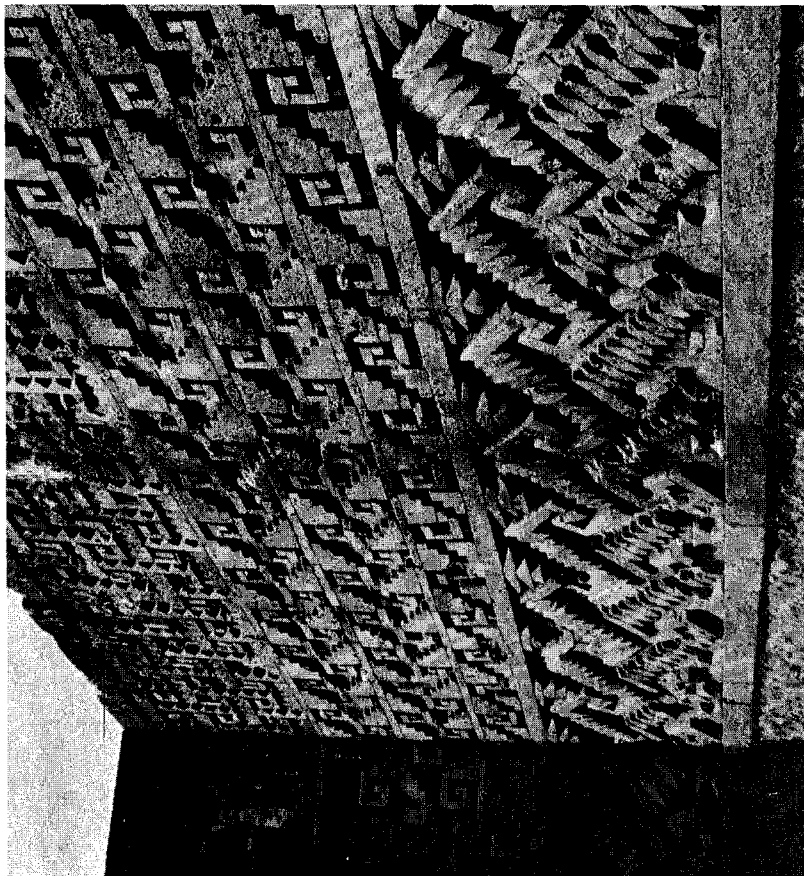
Mexico is a tactile country, a welter of textures. Everything about it seems to be in high relief set off by stark light and shadow.

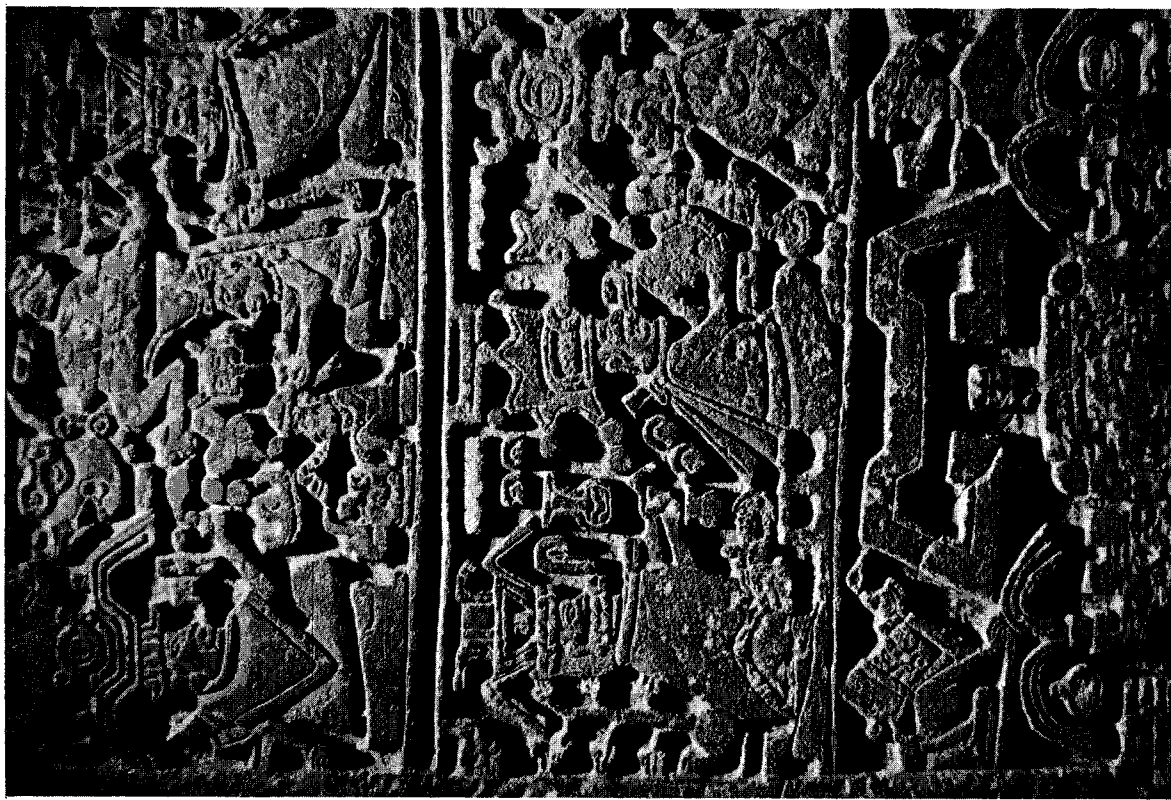
In almost all their artistic expressions, Mexicans tend toward a careful symmetry—whether it is in the pattern formed by neatly arranged fruits in the market, in the rigid lines of tables and chairs in a cantina, in the formal design of an ancient stele, in the considered balance of a Rivera mural. While strong perpendiculars give a sense of solidity, a maze of convoluted forms, often derived from nature, may fret the space between. There is a tendency toward overstatement and a need to fill all the surface of a panel or façade or arch—a sort of esthetic agoraphobia.

The photos which follow are a minute sampling of textures which abound in Mexico's landscape, architecture and everyday life. This richness can be attributed to the long tradition among the Indians of working with the earth—planting corn in its soil, shaping pottery from its clay, carving sculpture from its stone. In the 16th century, two cultures merged both of which constructed monumental religious architecture, lavishly bedecked with surface design. Spanish Catholicism encouraged the proliferation of plastic adornments. The dual heritage is amply revealed in Mexico's modern artistic creations.

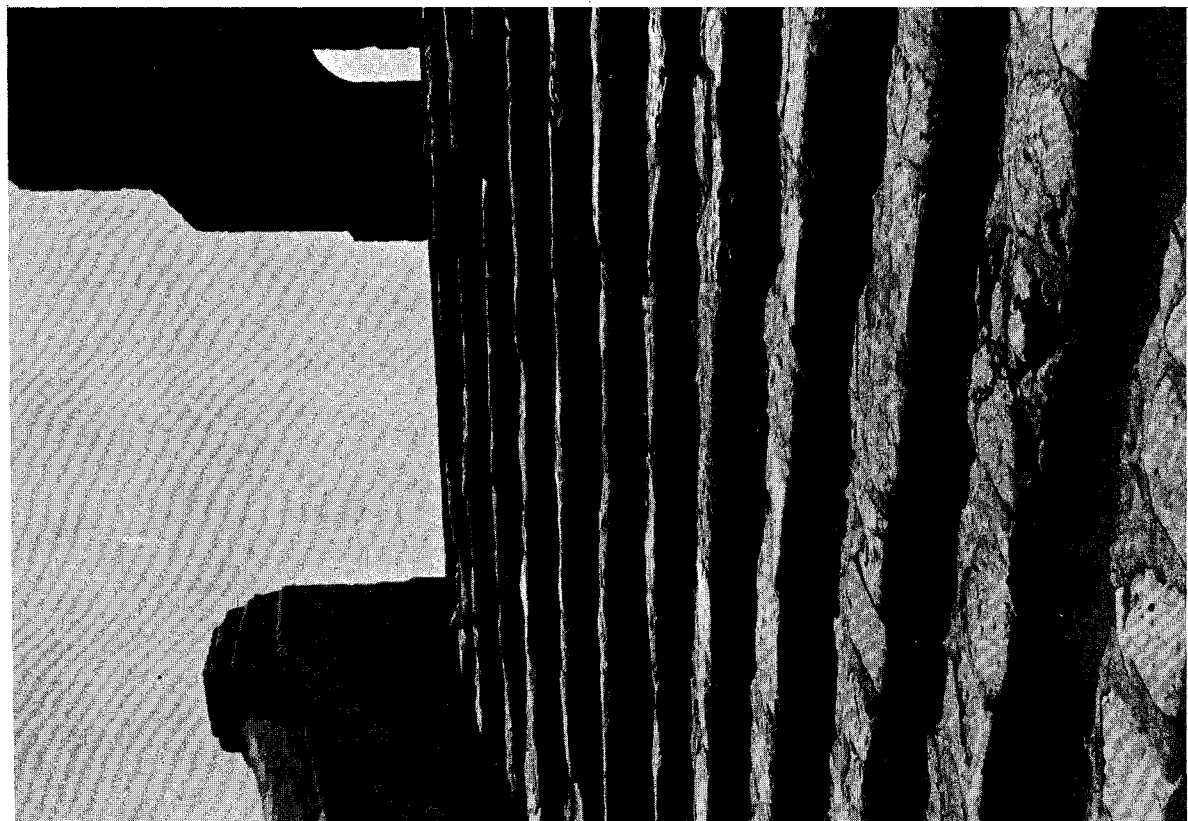
Captions on page 8.

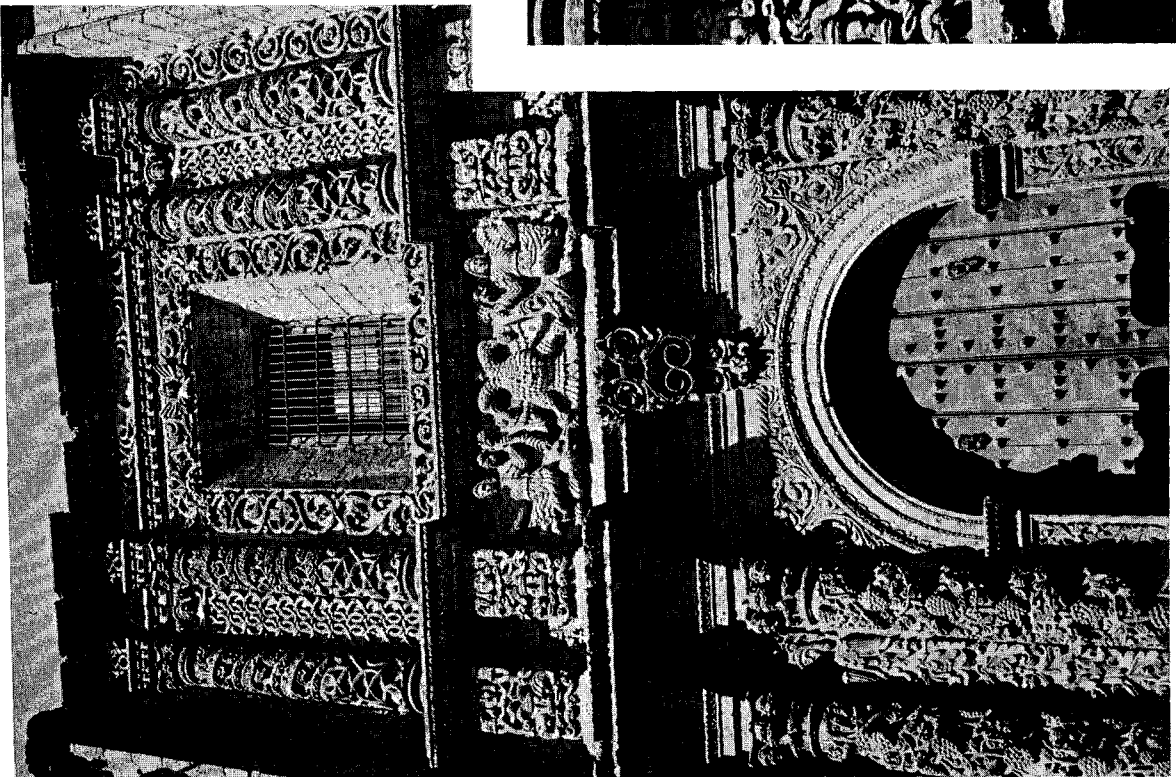
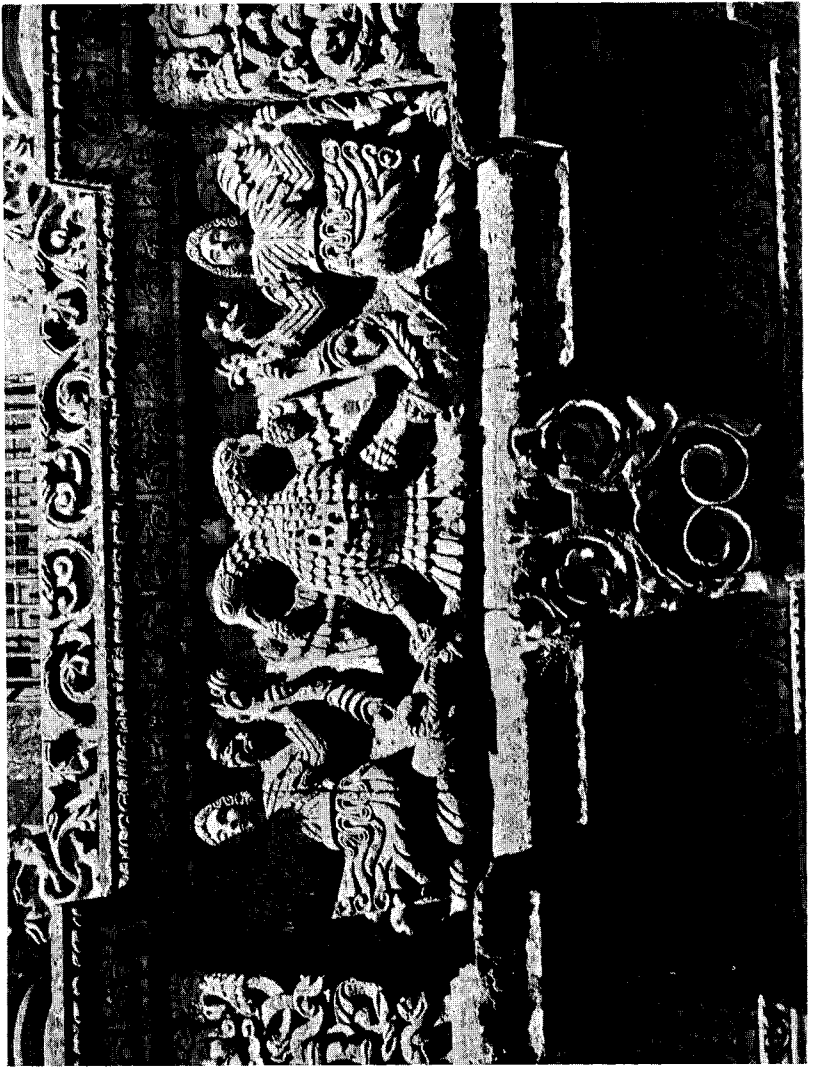


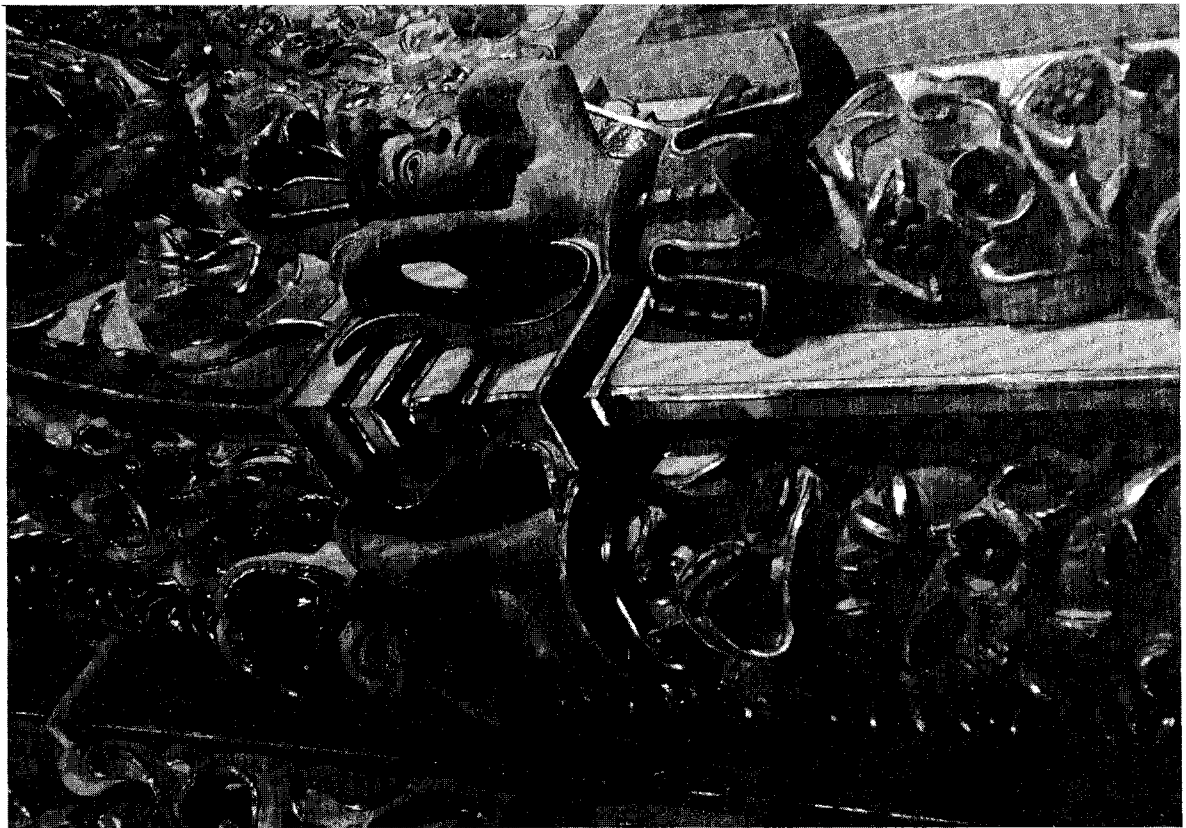


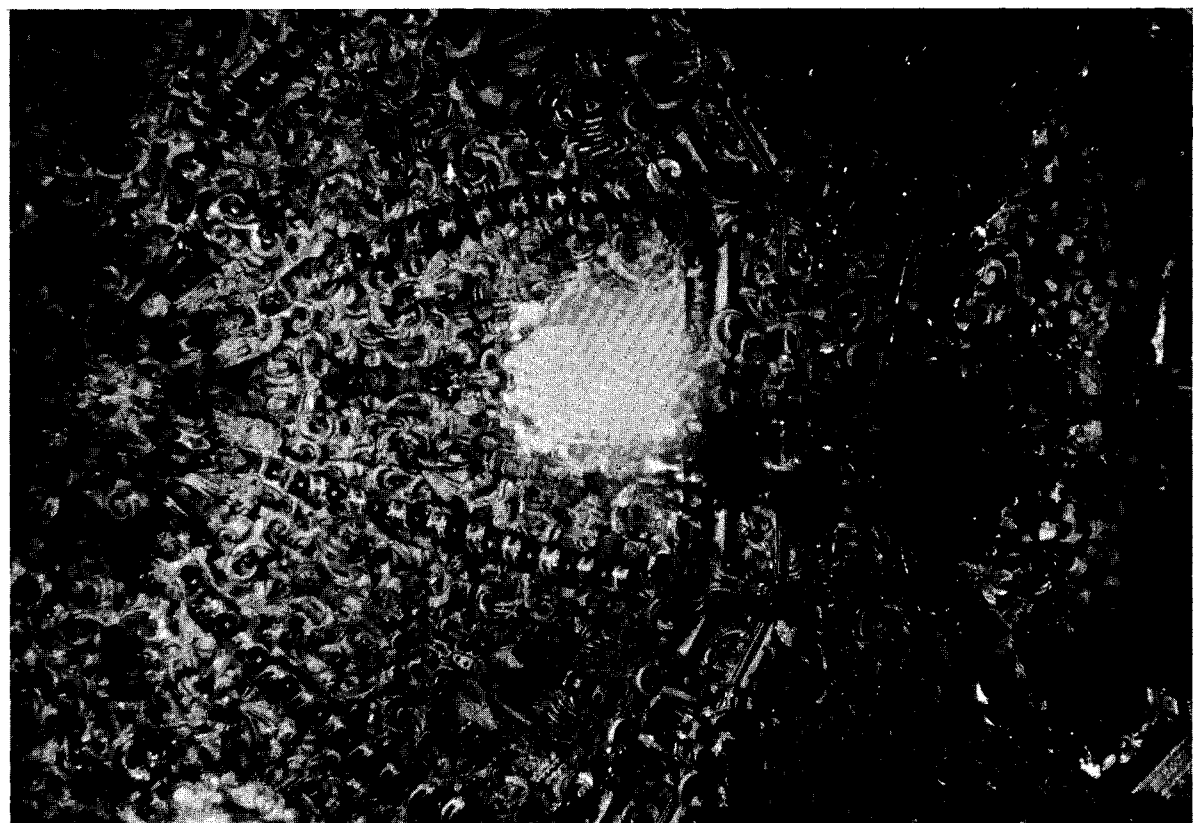












Captions:

p. 1 The fire escape of the Teatro Benito Juarez in Guanajuato.

p. 2 Left. Mitla, State of Oaxaca. Stone mosaics of geometric design distinguish the artistic style of the Mixtecs. The small stones were cut and assembled with precision.

p. 2 Right. Monte Albán, State of Oaxaca. One of several so-called "Dancers", each of which is incised on a large slab. Although the physical distortions and pained expressions suggest the postures of today's dancers, it is unlikely that the Monte Albán figures had any connection with revelry.

p. 3 Left. Stele carved by Mixtec lapidaries, found in a tomb near Culiapán, State of Oaxaca.

p. 3 Right. A detail of the façade of the Baroque Cathedral of Oaxaca. The local stone used in most of the city's architecture is a pale green which changes tone in sun, shadow and rain.

p. 4 Left and right. The 16th century Dominican monastery in Yanhuitlán, State of Oaxaca. On the left, the steps leading up to the church show the wear of time and, in the background, one of the huge buttresses supporting the massive fortress monastery is in silhouette. On the right, a detail of the side door to the church.

p. 5 Left and right. The Church of Santa Mónica in Guadalajara, one of Mexico's finest examples of Baroque. A main entrance, on the left, is intricately carved with twisting vines and grapes. On the right, a detail of that entrance.

p. 6 Left and right. Two details of the ornate interior of the Church of Santa María Tonantzintla, one of the most extravagant decorations in the world. Executed by Indians, it is a mass of high relief cherubs, scrolls and fruits brightly painted in green, blue, red and yellow. State of Puebla.

p. 7 Left. The sunlight-flooded dome of Santa María Tonantzintla.

p. 7 Right. Bottles in a yard outside a tequila distillery, Cananea, Sonora.

Photos, text, captions: FMF

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