
Portrait of a Designer



**PEDRO
RAMÍREZ VÁZQUEZ**

by KAREL WENDL

The Museum of Modern art in Mexico City.

After the many and enthusiastic accolades which greeted the inauguration of Olympic House, it seemed a good moment to direct the spotlight once more towards the creator of this work in glass and marble which is a worthy addition to the park at Vidy. The personality of Pedro Ramirez Vázquez is difficult to grasp, so great is the multiplicity of his talents, his actions and his works. His activities cannot be defined by his title of architect alone.

On the one hand, he is the creator of constructions which form part of highly prestigious public building programmes: museums, stadia, schools, churches, embassies, ministries, some of which are internationally known.

He is also an artist who expresses himself in decoration, graphics and glassware.

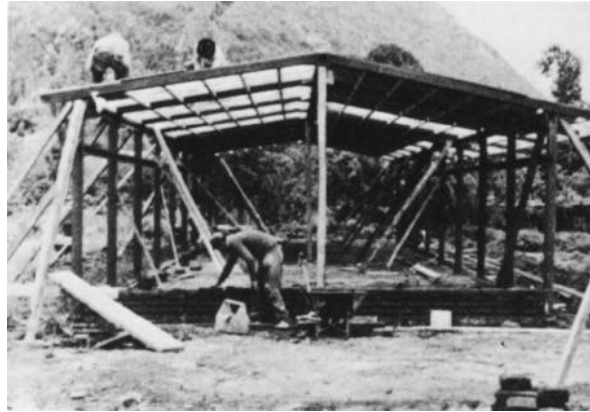
His intelligent and purposeful devotion to the public cause and to the social actions needed by the Mexican people led him to take on governmental responsibilities as Minister of Human Settlements and Public Works.

Pedro Ramirez Vázquez, urged on by the strength of his humanitarian convictions, has distinguished himself in the public domain, finding ways of putting his talents to the service of his aspirations in terms of social improvement. This commitment on the part of an architect desirous of fulfilling to the best of his ability the needs of his contemporaries and of improving their cultural environment is the mark of his exceptional temperament.

Mexico, a country which is in the process of creating a political and administrative framework for the expression of its personality and its independence, provides Pedro Ramirez Vázquez, highly conscious as he is of his social responsibilities, with the conditions favourable to the launching of an industrialisation process

necessary to adapt to the realities of a developing country.

It was a result of the construction between 1944 and 1964 of 35,000 schools in country areas of different types and with differing climates under the direction of Pedro Ramirez Vázquez that it was possible to speed up the improvement in the country's literacy rate. During those two decades, standardised metallic structures were distributed throughout the country to



Structures adapted to local conditions



form the skeletons of schoolrooms, which were then completed with walls and roof made from local materials and built by local labour to suit the particular sites and the climatic conditions of the region.

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It was with the same concern for adaptation to local atmosphere that he constructed fifteen popular markets in certain areas of Mexico City, using concrete structures which provide excellent thermal insulation at little cost.

Ramírez Vázquez's deep-seated conviction that the people must be constantly involved in the institution of a more equitable society gives an exceptional character to this work. The influence of his didactic passion explains the *simplicity* and the power of his architecture, which is designated to give the people a sense of the grandeur of contemporary civilisation, heir to the civilisations which followed one another on its soil.

The concern of Pedro Ramírez Vázquez to teach through his work, to awaken sensibilities, to reinforce the dignity of man, is most apparent in his museographical designs. The great museums he has created, among them the *Anthropology and History Museum*, the most ambitious both in its plan and in the quality and originality of its design, bear witness to this desire for accessibility to the people at all cultural levels, to help them become aware of the wealth of their past and to become acquainted with contemporary creations. In that museum in particular, everything seems to have been done to enhance the pleasure of the aesthete and to favour the researches

of the archeologist, the ethnologist and the historian. Thus, the museum is also a centre designed for the education of the young, who may discover their not only distant past, but also, thanks to the ethnological presentations, the present as they still know it in their provinces.

In the design of his museums, Ramírez Vázquez has given expression to his pedagogical concern, his aesthetic sense and his creative faculties, with a perfect awareness of the fabulous heritage of the ancient Mexican cultures and the desire to see these remains find a neighbourly coexistence with the most authentic forms of contemporary architecture. He is currently in the process of preparing the museography of the future Olympic Museum in Lausanne, which will employ the most modern electronic technologies to show and explain its contents to the public.

Pedro Ramírez Vázquez has also created a space now consecrated as the Basilica of the *Virgin of Guadalupe* and visited by the faithful in whom it inspires fervent devotion and a desire for higher things. Both within and without, forms, colours and light merge to create a great mystic whole worthy of the faith of the Mexican people.

Another creation that confirms the talent of this architect for bringing crowds together in a place where popular fervour can find expression is the *Aztec Stadium*, which can hold 110,000 spectators at football matches. Designed for the Games of the XIXth Olympiad, the simplicity of its composition and the strict adaptation of its structures to the efforts involved in coping with such large numbers of people are the qualities which give it its power and underline its symbolic value.

His most recent creation, the new IOC administrative headquarters in Lausanne, is an example of an architecture which blends perfectly with its environment, reflecting at once the dignity and ancient tradition of the Olympic Movement and its modernity, providing those who use it with a peaceful atmosphere favourable to their work.

In keeping with his desire to serve, Pedro Ramírez Vázquez is also a great defender of the Olympic ideals, for he is conscious of their importance for mankind. As President of the Organising Committee for the Games of the XIXth Olympiad, he employed all his talent and dedication in the preparation of Games which



View of the Aztec Stadium

were exceptional not only from the sports but also from the cultural point of view. During those Games and throughout the months which preceded them, Mexico City experienced the most intensive cultural life in its history, thanks to the presence of artists and works of art of the highest excellence from all the continents. A member of the International Olympic Committee since 1972, he works untiringly for Olympism, not only as an architect but in many other areas, for instance within the Cultural Commission, of which he is the Chairman.

We would need many more pages to describe the other architectural achievements of Pedro Ramírez Vázquez and his activities as innovator, administrator, organiser and social servant. His approach consists first of all of an in-depth analysis of the requirements to be fulfilled; he then puts forward a number of solutions before seeking the most

appropriate practical and conceptual means for their application. He always surrounds himself with a circle of colleagues to whom he gives stimulation and encouragement and who, for their part, enlarge his sphere of interest. His extraordinary ability to be perfectly at ease with exceptional projects, finding each time the spatial solution best adapted to the accommodation of large numbers of people in various contexts — educational, consciousness-raising, spiritual or recreational — is drawn from a Christian culture and inspired by a social ideal.

A child of Mexico, a citizen who actively strives for a fairer society, and an architect heart and soul, whose talent provides him with the means to translate his convictions into reality, Pedro Ramírez Vázquez is a creator dedicated to the service of the community.

K. W.