PART III

RACE AND NATIONALISM

8

Race and Miscegenation in Early Twentieth-Century Mexican Architecture

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> The deepest and most disturbing lesson taught by the Ciudad Universitaria [University City] is the questionable role that contemporary architecture has played, in some instances, away from its birthplace. . . . The powerful stirring of native impulses should force upon our architects a re-evaluation of building concepts, in relation to ethnic traditions and needs. Has our generation, in an exuberant realization of technical forms for a technical civilization, stepped carelessly over the subtle and irrepressible demands of populations outside the orbit of technology? It is perhaps time for us to learn from the mistakes of too-ardent camp followers that even economic leadership can be much more effective when it respects and encourages the cultural inheritance of peoples.
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> **Sybil Moholy-Nagy, "Mexican Critique" (November 1953)**

Sybil Moholy-Nagy's "Mexican Critique," one of the earliest international evaluations of the new campus for the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), is paradoxical in its observations (figure 8.1). One is not sure whether she is ruthlessly criticizing the architectural direction that Mexico took and that reached a particular culmination in the early 1950s or if she is subtly suggesting that architects throughout the world need to learn from the Mexican example. Her position here is doubly paradoxical as her piece harshly criticized most of the architectural decisions that tied the university to other (international) modern experiments and that gave it its modernist character. Nevertheless, at the crux of her observations is the role that ethnicity—whether for good or bad—has played in the development of this modern style of architecture in Mexico. What is clear is that she didn't see the university's design as one example in a long process that, on the one hand, was centered on investigations about which Mexican historical roots or traditions could be applied to modern architecture and that, on the other

Fig. 8.1 Gustavo Saavedra, Juan Martinez, and Juan O'Gorman (Juan O'Gorman murals), Main Library, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Mexico City, 1946–1952.

hand, was partially based on a discourse of miscegenation. That discourse would ultimately find itself articulated in art, architecture, and in the desires for plastic integration that found an idealized expression in the construction of the University City.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, cultural debates in Mexico revolved around the revival of pre-Hispanic traditions because these represented the Mexican "race," pure and uncorrupted by the colony, in contrast to a nationalist architecture derived from a contemporary understanding of the people, their character, and culture that would have been forged from the colonial period through modern times. Both positions were central to the project of creating a sense of Mexican nationalism centered on notions of common heritage, language, and traditions that would reduce conflicts between different social groups. As this nationalism was also rooted in contemporary ideas of race and racial mixture as means to characterize a "people," the influence of late nineteenth-century European racial discourses and their contestation in the early twentieth century

played a central role in its definition. Similarly, notions of the effects of racial mixing and eugenics that tinged some of the arguments for nationalism were translated as broader concepts to characterize forms of social or cultural change rather than racial ones. Definitions regarding the purity of the Mexican race and of a Mexican hybrid race—or mestizo, as it would be called—were central to the development of theories and projects for a nationalist architecture as well as contested terrains in regard to what defined the modern Mexican people in the first half of the twentieth century.[1] In this way, the very definitions of race could be seen, in and of themselves, as expressions of "fictive ethnicities," to use Étienne Balibar's term. These "constructed" forms of ethnicities were intended to interpellate subjects into a collectivity as a way to propose (or impose) a sense of unity and historical mission congruent with the ideals of the state and in opposition to a universalistic representation of the people.[2] The very idea of race was extremely labile and open-ended within the Mexican context; it was used as more of a descriptor of a historical lineage or social construction of identity than as a notion of biological difference.

During the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), a keen interest in and awareness of the importance of the pure, "uncorrupted" past began to develop as a reaction to the Europeanizing tendencies of the Porfirio Díaz regime, which the revolution removed from power. As a result, in the aftermath of the conflict, the pre-Hispanic past was not only championed and idealized, but it also came to stand as an example of the true spirit of the Mexican race. As such, it could still have a strong impact in the present. The social agenda inherent within the Mexican Revolution seems to have enabled many cultural producers and intellectuals to rethink the pre-Hispanic past. This type of thinking was exemplified in Manuel Gamio's *Forjando Patria* (Forging Nationhood, 1916), published during the revolution (figure 8.2).

Gamio, a Columbia University–educated anthropologist who studied under Franz Boas,[3] argued that social equality could be achieved through education and changes in social relations between the indigenous population and other social classes. This view reflected Boas's own ideas of the processes of cultural development, which upended the belief that certain races were culturally "inferior." Instead, in *The Mind of Primitive Man* (1911), Boas argued that knowledge was an expression of the environment, social conditions, and the role of traditions of different groups.[4] As a student of Boas, Gamio saw the modern understanding of "primitive" cultures ultimately as a reflection of the contrast between the observer's and "primitive" person's particular environment, social configuration, and relationship to tradition. Such outlooks, he believed, could be overcome with a different perspective on how culture was produced.

For Gamio, art was one field in which cultural barriers could be removed. He

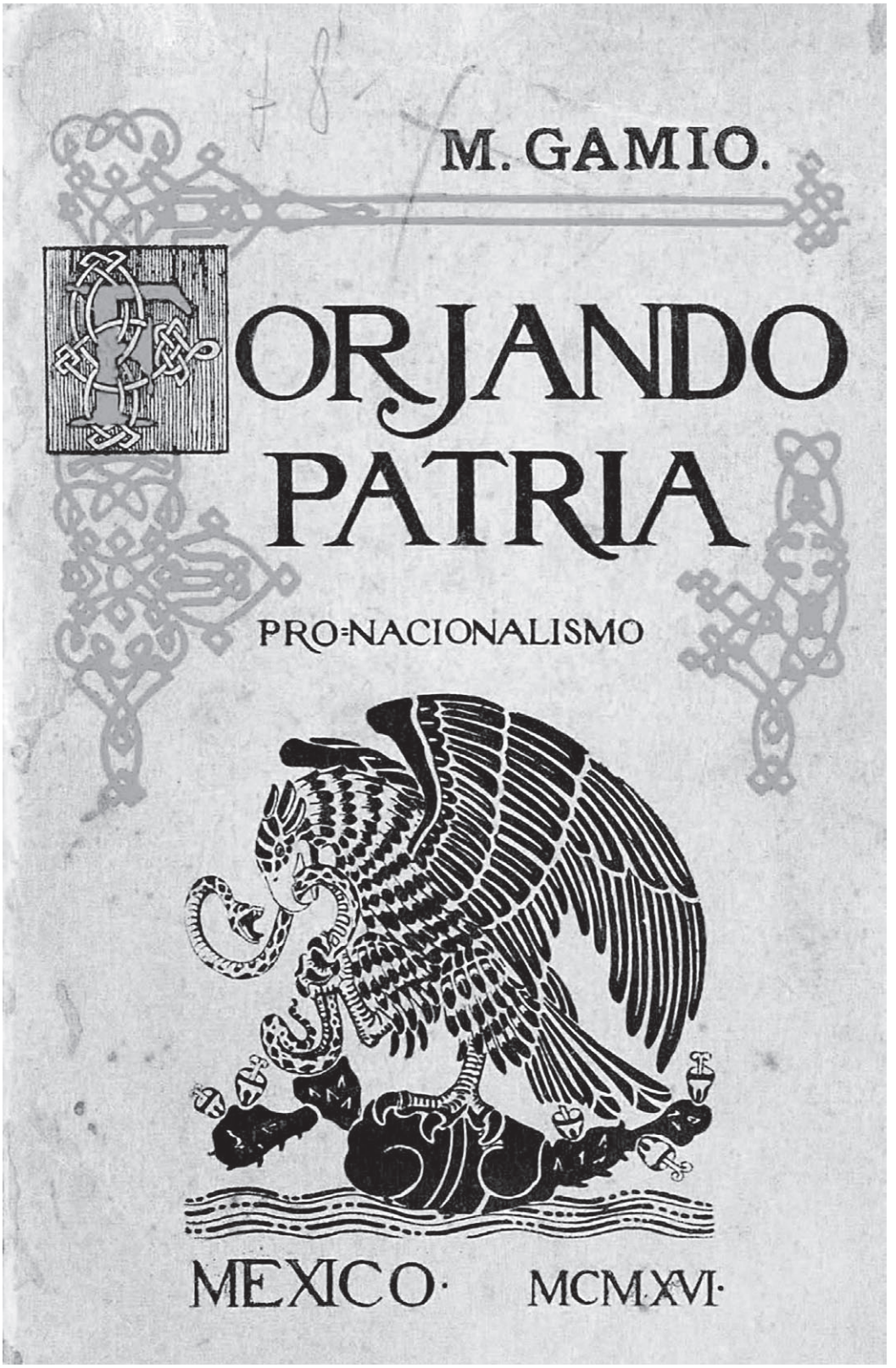

Fig. 8.2 Manuel Gamio, *Forjando Patria*, cover, 1916.

sought to foster an appreciation for pre-Hispanic art despite dominant modern and Western aesthetic sensibilities. Gamio believed that in order to appreciate pre-Hispanic art, one needed to be familiar with the culture that had produced it. He understood that in order to redeem and create a shared national culture—one of the bases for a strong nationalism—a transformation and melding of aesthetic taste needed to take place. This meant uniting the preferences of the indigenous class, which he saw as based on pre-Hispanic traditions, with those of the middle class, which were based on European traditions. Furthermore, he argued, it was unfair to judge pre-Hispanic cultural artifacts through a European lens and, at the same time, attempt to emulate the pre-Hispanic by simply copying its forms and styles; this, he said, would only create a confused and desolate hybrid.[5]

Mexico had the three elements that made a country strongly nationalistic according to Gamio: it was composed of a people who were members of the same race, spoke the same language, and shared the same culture or cultural manifestations. Most importantly for him, its people also had a shared past. This determined what they valued in the present as well as what they understood about their country in political, social, and ethical terms. Because of these shared elements, Gamio postulated that the unification of the different races and classes would lead to the disappearance of linguistic and cultural barriers and a modern, coherent, and homogeneous culture would arise—a position in line with contemporary theories regarding the construction of Mexican identity through the cultural mixing of races. For Mexican art to be truly Mexican, Gamio wrote, it had to be "its own; it had to be national; it had to reflect in an intensified and embellished way the joys, the sorrows, life, the soul of the people."[6] And for him, the means to achieve the full understanding of present Mexican culture was being materialized by the revolution itself, in the way that it was hybridizing the different races and classes. Gamio concluded *Forjando Patria* by noting that the Mexican Revolution allowed for "the fusion of races, the convergence and fusion of cultural manifestations, linguistic unification, and economic equilibrium between the social groups."[7]

While some artists and architects were developing a syncretic art—backed by José Vasconcelos under the Ministry of Education and discussed later in this chapter—others followed a strand of Gamio's beliefs and explored the possibilities of cultural production based solely on pre-Hispanic ideals. This difference became central in debates regarding nationalism in modern art and architecture in Mexico. One of the advocates for pre-Hispanic architecture was Manuel Amábilis. Born in Mérida, Yucatán, Amábilis studied at the École Spéciale d'Architecture in Paris.[8] Throughout his life, much of his architectural works and writings responded to the pre-Hispanic and, more specifically, Mayan legacy of Mexico. Amábilis's writings—such as *La Arquitectura Precolombina de México* (1929, reprinted 1956),[9] *Donde* (1933), *Mística de la Revolución Mexicana* (1937), and *Los Atlantes de Yucatán*

(1963)—addressed the importance of drawing on pre-Hispanic historical sources for the development of a modern Mexican culture. He also served as professor of architectural theory in the School of Architecture at the National University in Mexico City.

Amábilis's general idea of architectural production for Mexico was centered on the importance that he placed on "abstract aesthetic systems" (*modalidades abstractas de estética*) that could be found throughout pre-Hispanic art and architecture. While considering himself a traditionalist, he contended that the imitation and reproduction of arts, decorative details, and styles of the past was inappropriate for the present since contemporary needs were different. Rather than simple imitation, Amábilis called for a different form of traditionalism: "My belief is precisely based on the fact that I consider, probably to the surprise of our young architects, that architecture must be *functional*, as it has never ceased to be. In fact, if we define our architectural traditionalism as the archive—enriched through time—of the technical and aesthetic systems of our race, it is evident that this archive is one of the functions that our architecture needs to express."[10] The contemporary Mexicans, in turn, were capable of understanding, interpreting, and translating pre-Hispanic works into the present precisely because these existed in and resulted from the same, specific geographical location. The Spanish colonizers, and the recent dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, he believed, were not able to erase the "racial sediment" of Mexicans, as it was part of the "ethnic roots of the people."[11] Here, as in other of Amábilis's writings, "race" stood as a metonym for the distinctive cultural, aesthetic, and other traits of pre-Hispanic peoples who occupied what is now contemporary Mexico.[12]

The task of the postrevolutionary government was to make race operative as a construction that would question class structures and introduce the Mexican people to traditional heritage. In this way, according to Amábilis, the state would "raise class consciousness" and "place in front of the people all of the social values, so that by knowing what they are capable of doing they can rekindle within their soul, at the conjure of its past greatness, the creative impulse characteristic of the Mexican race. . . . [By awakening the race from] its long sleep, a resurgence of Mexican art, well adapted to our actual conditions, will take place."[13]

Amábilis sought to bring the collective unconscious of traditions and sensibilities that had lain dormant since pre-Hispanic times into the present environment and social configurations where they would adapt to become more universal, cosmopolitan, and hybridized. This meant, for example, that modern architecture would be functional in its response to "the functions characteristic of the Mexican people and not the French, German, or North American."[14] Again and again, Amábilis's call was for contemporary architects to understand the customs of the Mexican people as well as their "idiosyncrasy and racial characteristics."[15] Modern

architecture in Mexico would have to be rooted both in the past and in the present climate, topography, and character of the people, and respond to modern scientific advances, construction, materials, and sensibilities. Through this, Mexico would be part of and contribute to the universal culture.

Paradoxically, Amábilis's architectural works—such as the Templo Masónico (Mérida, 1915), the Mexican pavilion for the Ibero-American Exhibition (Seville, 1929), the Parque de las Américas (Mérida, 1945), and the Monumento a la Patria (Mérida, 1951)—are highly ornamented and stylized through the use of pre-Hispanic decorative motifs, ornaments, and references, even though their general organization and plans are based on the abstract principles that he advocated theoretically. Although he believed that the characteristic elements of and foundations for his work would be innately understood by viewers, he relied on a formal architectural and ornamental language based on pre-Hispanic forms that would not only be intelligible and accessible to the people but that would also speak directly to them.[16]

Another line of development for modern architecture in Mexico following the revolution was centered on the idea of miscegenation. During the revolutionary struggles in Mexico, a group of architects and intellectuals met to define the character of what architecture in Mexico should be. At the core of their discussions was the role and importance of race and racial mixture characterized by Spanish colonial architecture. For them, this architecture was representative of the "true character" of Mexican identity: it was based on the imported styles from Spain, but manufactured by the indigenous population who interpreted many of the forms idiosyncratically and altered and localized them. Architects Federico Mariscal and Jesús Acevedo noted the importance of the mixture of races both in the past and for the future as a means to not only empower the (primarily indigenous) population but also to legitimize its cultural production.

These discussions were part of broader philosophical and political considerations that would ideologically frame the notion of *mestizaje* (racial mixture) as foundational to incorporating the "Indian" population into the modern state. It should be noted, however, that the use of the term or idea of "race" within the concept of mestizaje was more of a social construct (rather than based on biological traits) that referred, broadly speaking, to the cultural and social characteristics of individual groups. As Allan Knight notes, "A range of characteristics determined 'racial'—or, we should properly say, *ethnic*—identification: language, dress, religion, social organization, culture and consciousness. Since these were social rather than innate biological attributes, they were capable of change; the ethnic status of both individuals and communities was not immutable. By dint of education, migration, and occupational shifts . . . Indians could become mestizos. . . . Clearly, therefore, the process of *mestizaje*, sometimes seen as basically racial, is in

fact social: 'mestizo' is an achieved as well as an ascribed status."[17] In mestizaje, therefore, race becomes a discursive category that is part of the state's ideological project for the integration or acculturation of the indigenous into the broader population. Historian Kelley Swarthout has described this as the consolidation of a racially and culturally heterogeneous population into a unified culture that would lessen the impact of racial, cultural, and class differences on the state's desire of unity and progress after the revolution.[18] Through mestizaje, a new modern Mexican identity was forged based on the assimilation of the indigenous population or popular masses and their culture into the new regime through education, by rejecting the parochialism of indigenous groups, and through the exaltation of a unified patriotic collectivity.

What characterized this new identity was its uniqueness: mestizaje, it was argued, defined the distinctive condition of the Mexican people, their culture, and their future. It highlighted the importance of the European or Hispanic tradition at the same time it emphasized the value of indigenous cultures. In short, it incorporated the Indian and its culture into "universal" Western civilization. Mestizaje ideology gained importance as it appeared to stand in contrast to President Porfirio Díaz's general promotion of positivism, a philosophical doctrine based on scientific method and social evolution—advanced by his advisors, known as the *cientificos* (scientists)—and his belief that European culture represented the highest point of human achievement.

The paradox of Díaz's government was the fact that Díaz himself was mestizo. And while he promoted foreign immigration and investment, which were associated with the development of infrastructure and business and modernization of the country, this immigration was later cited as one of the causes of xenophobia and brutality against the indigenous population. Díaz was also lauded as an example of mixed racial heritage and as the leader of what could be described as the mestizo bourgeoisie. So while his government embraced positivism to develop its sociopolitical and economic policies, positivist theories of race never found a steady ground in Díaz's government.[19] Instead Díaz and the cientificos adopted social Darwinist theories that pointed to the deficiencies of the population that was unfit, poorly educated, and born into poverty. Positivism, as the historian Leopoldo Zea has argued, became a tool to direct the transformation and modernization of Mexico through government's technocratic and scientifically guided rule.[20] This was expressed not only in the educational, governmental, and economic projects under Díaz's government but also in its promotion and emulation of European (in particular Parisian) neoclassical and Beaux-Arts architecture. Díaz's overthrow, then, marked a shift away from positivism and the embrace of Spanish colonial architecture over a Beaux-Arts style.

Thinking about what architecture could be produced outside of the parameters

established by the Díaz regime, architects Jesús Acevedo and Federico Mariscal argued that colonial architecture was a paradigmatic example of built mestizaje and, as such, was an apt style for modern postrevolution Mexico. In this case, the aim was to suggest that architecture could express not only the hybrid character of the Mexican people but also that it was possible to instrumentalize the idea of racial mixture in order to develop new aesthetic principles.

Between 1914 and 1918, during the revolutionary period, Acevedo delivered a series of lectures defining the character of a truly Mexican architecture. For him, architecture always represented the race that constructed it. As such, colonial architecture in Mexico was truly Mexican: "The fact was that the indigenous people learned the different professions that make up the arts . . . at the moment of translating, with admirable dedication, the foreign designs that served as models for them, something of the native and inaccessible hid within their work. . . . Nothing more natural . . . that when the colonizers implanted any style and architectural tendency, these would be modified by that dark current; always latent in the native."[21] Acevedo defined race as something not based on biological traits but rather understood as an expression of pre-Hispanic sensibilities and traditions. An ungenerous reading of Acevedo would note that his notion of race simply suggested a condition of inherent otherness—what was not European or European in character. He defined the native, for instance, as docile in contrast to the European, or as a mere tool to be used by the colonizers. This otherness was characterized by stereotypes; he noted, for instance, that the Mexican architectural laborer had "Asian" faculties, meaning an ability and interest in precision and fine detail work.[22]

It is also clear that for Acevedo architecture was the expression of human life. As such, it had "the imprint of the race [upon it]," as he would note elsewhere.[23] Clearly influenced by William Morris, whom he cites in other moments of his talks, Acevedo understood architectural production in a materialist sense: as an expression (or effect) of human life and the social system within which it was produced. He believed that people give architecture its character and that the only way for architecture to advance and become more modern is through the use of new materials.[24] Since it did not adapt to "the needs of constant progress," colonial architecture stopped evolving in the nineteenth century, according to Acevedo. It did not conform, for instance, to the imported architectural styles, and, as a result, the relationship between the people and their architecture was lost.

The education that Acevedo received in the Beaux-Arts curriculum of the Academia de San Carlos and his work under the French architect Émile Bénard—who had been hired by Díaz to design the Legislative Palace—most likely put him in contact with the theories of Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc, which became important for the postrevolution functionalist movement. Viollet-le-Duc pro-

posed that new architecture be based on functional, national, and social premises. Design, he argued, was based on the program and the habits of the culture for which it was built.[25] These are similar to the requirements for modern architecture noted by Acevedo. However, Viollet-le-Duc—under the influence of Arthur de Gobineau—added that the evolution of architecture was also based on the natural or biological "imperturbable" laws of science, and, as such, race was a factor that defined it.[26] Acevedo defined architecture's relationship to race, instead, as based on cultural developments over the long duration of the colony.

It was necessary, then, to return to the colonial style as it contained the "roots of the Mexican tree whose harvest we must work hard at."[27] Although devoted to the overhaul of colonial architecture, Acevedo did laud the style for not only re-creating a monumental architecture, but also for instituting different means of production. Indigenous labor was essential to the construction of colonial-style buildings, and, according to the architect, "The worker, invariably destined to machine labor as a consequence of our sad social regime, must occupy its new position as teacher, as creator, as artist!" In this way, Acevedo channeled Morris and John Ruskin's theory of the workers as agents free to express themselves through their work and Ruskin and Morris's understanding of work as more than just disinterested production and the working environment as a place worthy of attention and reform.

Federico Mariscal similarly advocated for the resurrection of colonial architecture in 1914. By pointing to how society, life customs, geography, and climate informed different architectural works, Mariscal showed that a national architecture represented both the natural and the social. Such an architecture represented "the life and more general customs characteristic of the whole life of Mexico as a nation. The current Mexican citizen, who forms the majority of the population, is a result of the material, moral, and intellectual mixture of the Spanish and aboriginal races that populated the Mexican land."[28] In other words, what was "Mexican" was the expression of the syncretism of a people and its culture that resulted from colonization. Like Acevedo, Mariscal saw colonial architecture as an evolution of imported foreign architectures. However, as importations continued after the wars of independence (1810–1822), they stopped expressing "Mexican" life and became alien to the people and the place of their construction, and, as such, they stopped evolving into what could be a modern, nationalist architecture.[29] This national architecture would emerge, according to Mariscal, from the study and understanding of the colonial period. By correcting the problems caused by the eclectic importation of foreign styles in the nineteenth century, the monumental legacy of the past could be re-created and bring about a rebirth of Mexican architecture and art.

These ideas would become foundational for the development of the artistic and

architectural program proposed for the Department of Public Education by José Vasconcelos. As early as 1916, Vasconcelos, echoing Acevedo and Mariscal in a lecture to the Sociedad de Bellas Artes in Lima, Peru, proposed that architects should search for "threads through which they could structure their development; these are, for example, certain successes of our national inheritance—such as the architecture of the time of the Colony. . . . The three centuries of Mexican architecture are still the best aesthetic realization of the Latin American race."[30] Vasconcelos's vision for a neo-colonial architecture—like Acevedo and Mariscal's—called for a mixture of the Spanish and indigenous races, ideas, and artistic traditions: a new aesthetic syncretism.

For Vasconcelos, colonial architecture not only created a spiritually elevating and inspiring environment, but it also represented Mexican character. He prized the grandiose and monumental in colonial architecture, full of light and vast spaces—as evident in his well-known statement: "Only the races that don't think put the ceiling at the height of their heads!" The designs of the schools for the Department of Public Education under his direction were thoroughly colonial in style and, as a consequence, to be read as Mexican. They were to reflect an authentic culture based on traditions and to meet modern educational needs. In addition, they served as the vehicle for and representation of Vasconcelos's transcendental beliefs: "We must continue building in [an architectural style that responds to the old colonial tradition], because we have the obligation to continue to create an autochthonous culture. . . . We reject the wooden house because it does not adapt to the ideal expression of our race coupled, as the ancients had, with the eternal. In this way, we will reject everything that is inferior to the ethnic and aesthetic potential of the Mexican."[31] Like Mariscal before him, for Vasconcelos an autochthonous Mexican architecture was always a result of the mixture of Spanish and native cultures—a complex cultural development that resulted from the specific natural environment and social configurations.

It was in his book *La Raza Cósmica* (The Cosmic Race, 1925) that he proposed a more far-reaching theory about the importance of miscegenation for Latin America. Here, he argued for the coming of a fifth race resulting from the mixing of all other races. In this vision, aesthetics were seen as the highest point of human achievement and the mixture of races (with their attendant cultures) would lead to the greatness of the fifth race. In this way, Vasconcelos reacted to contemporary theories that linked social progress to racial purity, such as those of Gobineau, whom he mentioned in his prologue to the 1948 edition of *La Raza Cósmica*.[32] This syncretic character became the guide that Vasconcelos employed as the basis for the architecture and decorative program of the headquarters of the Secretaría de Educación Publica. Vasconcelos made this clear in the last sentence of the theoretical section of *La Raza Cósmica*:

> To express [the ideas of the cosmic race] that today I am trying to explain . . . I tried to give them shape in the new Palace of Public Education in Mexico. Without enough elements to make precisely what I wanted, I had to conform to a Renaissance Spanish construction, with two courtyards, with arcades and walkways that give the impression of a wing. In the panels of the four angles in the first courtyard I had someone make allegories of Spain, Mexico, Greece, and India, the four particular civilizations that have the most to contribute to the formation of Latin America. Afterwards, under these four allegories, four large stone sculptures should have been placed representing the four great contemporary races: the White, the Red, the Black, and the Yellow in order to show that America is the home of all and that it needs them all. . . . All this to indicate that we will arrive in America, before any other part of the globe, to the formation of a race created with the treasures of all of the previous ones, the final race, the cosmic race.[33]

The building relied on a modernized version of the colonial style that reflected the synthetic culture of the cosmic race. This architectural syncretism was based on the stylistic mixture of colonial architecture with modern materials, such as reinforced concrete, and the introduction of modern programmatic elements. It was clear in Vasconcelos's inauguration speech for the building that his intentions were to make the structure a part, symbol, and activator in the process of postrevolution reconstruction. Within the context of the utopian aesthetic and philosophical theories that Vasconcelos developed, this synthesis and transformation would be incomplete without the mediatory capacity of painting and sculpture, used in a referential and didactic manner, to transform the somewhat self-referential and autonomous qualities of the emerging architecture. These representational, legible, and collective systems were to educate the diverse elements of the population about the sociopolitical transformations taking place in postrevolutionary Mexico.

Second, Vasconcelos's requirements included the sculptural expression of racial miscegenation in the Hispano-American culture through Manuel Centurión's allegorical reliefs of the four races: Quetzalcoatl, representing the Mexican race; Plato, representing the race of Greece; Buddha, representing the Indian race; and, an image of the ship, *Las Casas*, representing Spain at the height of its colonial power (figure 8.3). Additionally, Ignacio Asúnsolo was to carve four statues to represent the "white, black, red, and yellow" races, also to be placed in the first courtyard, which was to be called the "Court of the Races." Only one of the statues (that for the white race) was ever modeled in plaster (figure 8.4). For Vasconcelos, these statues indicated the racial evolution of humanity. As he put it, "Latin America boasts in possessing the contribution of the four human types and is preparing to build, with all of these and by demolishing all prejudices, the truly

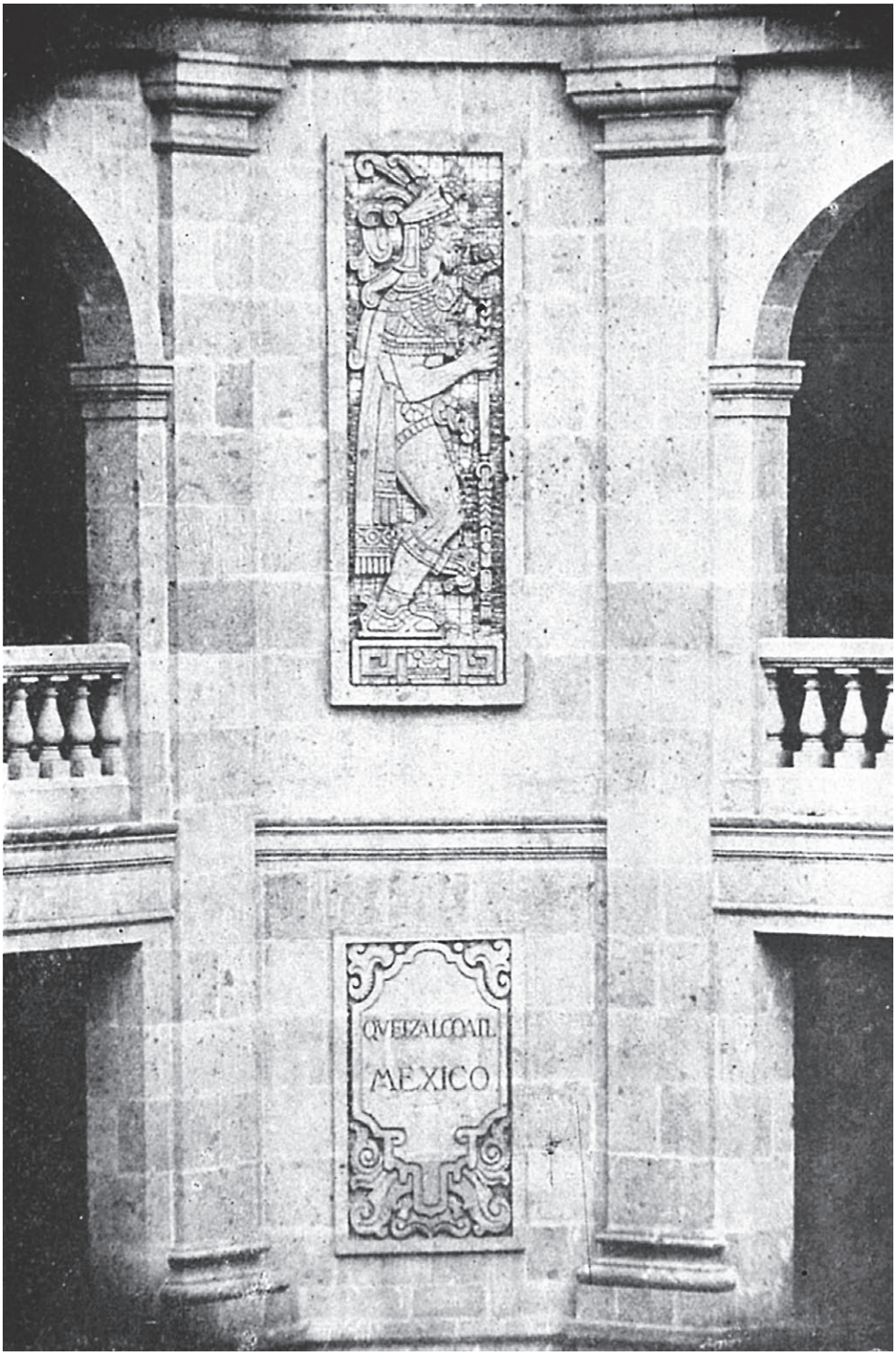

Fig. 8.3 Manuel Centurión, *Quetzalcoatl: The Mexican Race, Court of the Races*, Secretaría de Educación Pública, Mexico City, 1922. Image from Secretaría de Educación Pública, *Edificios Construidos por la Secretaría de Educación Pública en los Años 1922–1924* (Mexico, 1924).

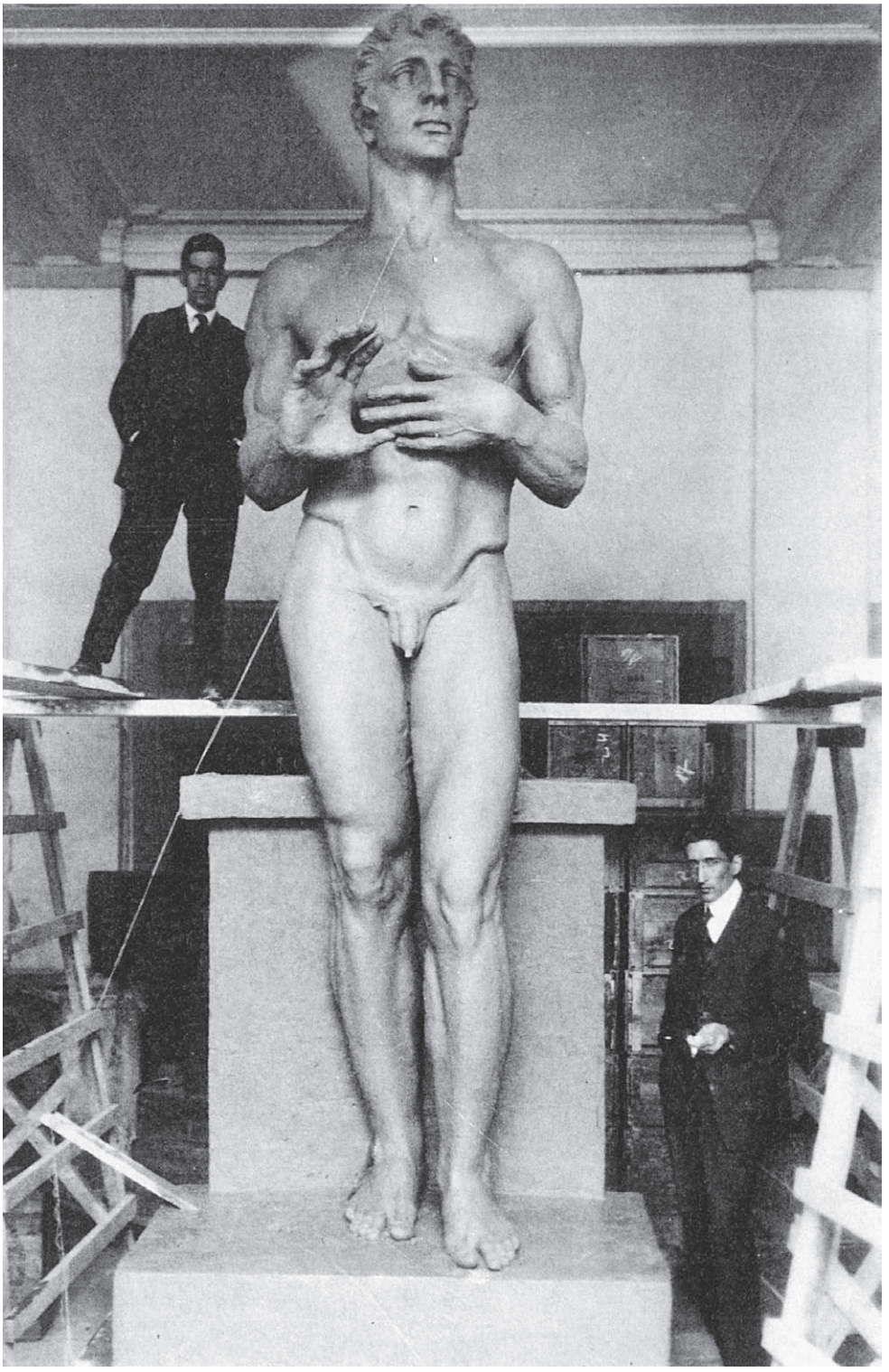

Fig. 8.4 Ignacio Asúnsolo, *The White Race*, 1922.

universal type." In the second court, Centurión carved reliefs on the corners representing branches of the plastic arts: sculpture, painting, music, and architecture. While the reliefs in the first patio represented the primary, racial, and cultural components of the cosmic race, the second patio contained its aesthetic components. The exaltation of these ideas through their architectural placement also suggests the importance that they held, symbolically, in the formation of a new racial and aesthetic culture.

For the mural program at the site, Vasconcelos encouraged the artists to focus on autochthonous cultural production, the syncretic condition of the people and their traditions, as well as the influences of time and past cultures. In addition to Vasconcelos's interests and requirements, the murals were guided by the *Manifesto of the Syndicate of Technical Workers, Painters and Sculptors* (December 1923): "The noble work of our race, down to its most insignificant spiritual and physical expressions, is native (and essentially Indian) in origin. With their admirable and extraordinary talent to create beauty, peculiar to themselves, the art of the Mexican people is the most wholesome spiritual expression in the world and this tradition is our greatest treasure. Great because it belongs collectively to the people."[34] This call for a nationalist art echoed the debates on architectural syncretism that sought work that represented the collective spirit. In addition, distinctions between "high and low" art would be eliminated through the incorporation of popular traditions into the new creative developments; in this way and through its placement in public spaces, art would become a part of life.

Ultimately, it was syncretic synthesis that Vasconcelos advocated as appropriate for Mexico and, broadly speaking, Latin America. This is clear, first, in his conception of Universópolis, the city destined to be the center of the cosmic race. Located in the Amazon, the metropolis would dispatch armies and planes to educate people instead of conquering them. For Vasconcelos, the opposite of Universópolis was Anglotown, the place from which colonizing troops were sent to dominate the world and eliminate rival races. This was, undoubtedly, part of Vasconcelos's critical campaign against the United States and its meddling in Latin American affairs. In Universópolis, everyone would be equal, nationhood would be transcended, and a more universal sense of community achieved. Its culture would be founded on free will and the metaphysical and mystical qualities of the arts. In addition, modern means of communication and education would dissolve geographical boundaries that, in turn, would lead to an "accelerated fusion of the races."[35] Reproduction of the species would become guided by aesthetics and education and, in Vasconcelos's schema, a form of eugenics guided by beauty would "prevent the mixture of the most divergent types." Instead of a Darwinist form of selection that mechanistically controlled the mixture of races and eradicated those

Fig. 8.5 José Chavez Morado, *Return of Quetzalcoatl*, School of Science, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), Mexico City, 1952.

that didn't fit, for the cosmic race "selection will be spontaneous, like the artist who, from all the colors available, chooses only the ones that best fit his intentions."[36] For Vasconcelos, Universópolis and the ideas behind it served as an alternative to creating nations that, according to Marissa K. López, would "replicate an evolutionary logic of race and perpetuate the colonizing forces of Anglo capital."[37]

The synthesis that Vasconcelos was after and the importance that he placed on the arts can be seen expressed most clearly in his promotion of plastic integration that would become a hallmark of modern architecture in Mexico. The 1952 campus for the UNAM is emblematic of this influence. Not only is it clear by the integration of art into its buildings, but also through its seal (which includes a map of Latin America) and its motto—*por mi raza, hablará el espiritu* (through my race, the spirit shall speak)—coined by Vasconcelos. Even in the 1950s, artists such as Francisco Eppens and José Chávez Morado included in their murals for the various university buildings references to mestizaje and, paradigmatically, the "races" or cultures of Vasconcelos's cosmic race (figure 8.5). In turn, references to pre-Hispanic architecture continued but in a more abstract spirit and with less direct decorative references. At the UNAM, for instance, Alberto Arai's Fronton Courts were lauded for their simple, abstract forms that evoked pyramids. Even when more specific elements were introduced into the designs, such as the use of the Atlanean statues of Tula or the colossal Olmec heads in public museums or pavilions designed by Pedro Ramírez Vázquez in the late 1950s and 1960s, these were

used to highlight the contrast between modern forms and materials and those of the past.

By the 1950s the utilization of race as a discourse as it had developed from the revolutionary moment became linked more to a broader, more ideological desire to express a Mexican national identity than to a transformation of what Vasconcelos called the "technical forms for a technical civilization." In other words, race was used to express visually Mexico's simultaneous historical legacy and its emerging modernity. The constructed notion of race and ethnicity proved to be a malleable tool for the expression of the desire of architects and, ultimately, the state, to define its uniqueness in order to achieve social cohesion by incorporating, in a utopic way, the majority of the population. By developing an ideology based on the fusion or hybridization of antagonistic or different social groups or forms, the state could ultimately remove antagonisms that held back the modernization of the nation. In this way, the search for built mestizaje and the glorification of pre-Hispanic works were guided by an ideological desire to unify the population through the mythifying of its "racial" history as a uniquely Mexican response to the placeless modernity of the West.