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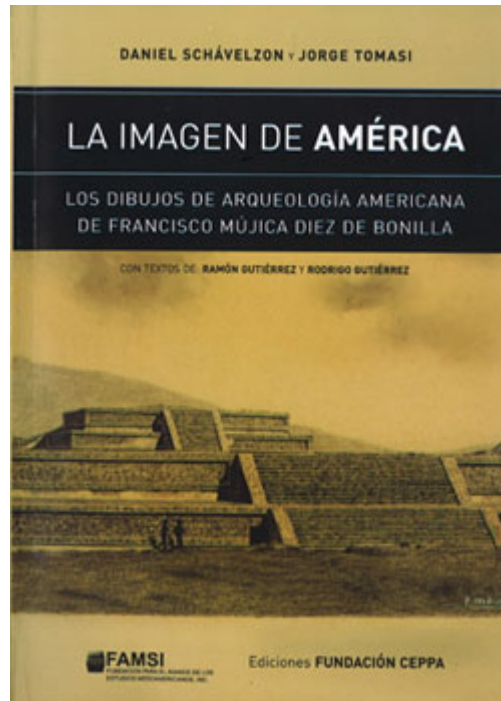
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Los Dibujos de Arqueología Americana de Francisco Mújica Díez de Bonilla

by Daniel Schávelzon and Jorge Tomasi

with texts by: Ramón Gutiérrez and Rodrigo Gutiérrez

Translation of the Spanish by Alex Lomónaco



Research Year: 2004

Culture: Various

Chronology: Contemporary

Location: Mesoamerica

Site: Teotihuacán, Chichén Itzá, Tula, etc.

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Presentation

by Daniel Schávelzon

In 1995 and thanks to the funds granted by FAMSI to study the history of archaeology of Teotihuacán, we had the chance to learn in Buenos Aires about the existence of a remarkable and almost unknown Mexican sketcher who had made outstanding surveys, plans and drawings, not only of Teotihuacán but also of numerous other archaeological

sites. The quality of his work and the anonymity that surrounded him as an individual have strongly attracted our attention and both facts led, shortly thereafter, to this salvage work once again made possible through FAMSI's support.

The backing about the significance of this sketcher came from Ramón Gutiérrez, when he published in 1998 a short bibliographical outline of his work. In fact, the published information about him hardly amounts to a few notes, including for example an article published in France in 1926 in a subsidiary art magazine, a major book published in 1928 with a title that showed no clues about this subject (*History of Skyscraper*) and an article of his own published later in Mexico, in 1932; in addition, there were a few secondary references left by Ignacio Marquina in his book *Arquitectura pre-hispánica* in the 1951 edition, where at least one complete drawing was present. This was about all we had, and it was intriguing, considering that his work was remarkable; shortly after we discovered, with surprise, that there were similar collections of drawings in the United States and México, made by his own hand, which remained unclassified and unpublished. The situation seemed even more peculiar, at the light of the momentum towards the study of drawing in archaeology observed in recent years, when new technologies gradually began to replace this art-technique, re-evaluating the heritage of the XIX and XX centuries with multiple publications and shows, though Mújica was absent from them.

The archive found at the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Buenos Aires, (*Museo Etnográfico de la Universidad de Buenos Aires*), exhibits an outstanding degree of preservation and includes some two hundred plates, mostly pencil-made, with a few others in color, in addition to numerous photographs and over one thousand postcards, found together with personal letters and documents that had to do with the years he spent in Argentina.

Mújica was a prolific sketcher and a magnificent artist who reached beyond the common standards. Just like the masterly achievements of some XIX century sketchers, like Frederick Catherwood or Mújica's colleague and probable master, Miguel Ángel Fernández, in the early years of Chichén Itzá (1926) he undertook the huge and systematic work of drawing all that could be drawn in Mesoamerican archaeology, particularly in Mexico. And if we think about the paradigm sketcher of archaeological architecture of the XX century, Ignacio Marquina, we shall see that they owed each other plenty, and that there was a relentless war between them that lasted several years, which in some way caused Mújica to make several crucial decisions about his life and work.

This book presents the complete archive of his graphic works in Argentina, his correspondence, his writings and other documents we were able to locate; all of this, in addition to its inherent value, has helped us to better understand at least a part of his life, that of a very complex personality, reflecting, simultaneously, the possible motifs that prevented his work from being made known even among specialists.

There are two other archives that include drawings made by Mújica, and both are presently unavailable: one of them at the Bancroft Library (United States) – unstudied

and unclassified so far¹ – and the second at the National Library of Mexico, (*Biblioteca Nacional de México*), in the reserved section. Based on this, we may assume that his production probably included some one thousand large plates.

On the other hand, Mújica has a number of works connected with regional planning in México of which we hardly have any information and whose analysis we are intentionally avoiding in this book as such works are entirely estranged from his activity as a draftsman of archaeological remains, an activity which to him was the center of his life.

It is our belief that recovering and making known this archive is important; it is the expression of an age when it was still necessary to have drawings made by the hand of an artist to feature all the objects and archaeological sites, as if pictures taken with a camera were not enough. Also, in our view, it is indispensable to gain understanding on Francisco Mújica's broader work as an architect who designed structures that were never built, but which helped to show, from the United States and Paris, this Neoprehispanic style. He was among those who attempted to use the ornaments of the past in modern construction, in a stylistic revival that in fact had no positive echoes, neither in America nor in the rest of the world.

Perhaps for personal reasons or due to his peculiar psychology, his silent work throughout fifty years of drawing buildings, sculptures and objects originated in Mesoamerica, was put away and forgotten.

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We wish to thank in the first place Dr. Sandra Noble, of FAMSI, as well its Board of Directors, for the infinite patience shown in view of the delay in the publication of this book. Likewise, we are indebted to Dr. José Antonio Pérez Gollán, director of the Ethnographic Museum, Buenos Aires, for having facilitated the access to this material. We also appreciate the help provided by Vivian Spoliansky, responsible for the documental archives stored at the Museum, and Gonzalo Iparraguirre, for his collaboration throughout the entire work; thanks to them, the Mújica collection shows an excellent state of preservation.

Submitted 07/16/2004 by:
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¹ Presently, the collection has been put away, as a consequence of the effects of one of the latest earthquakes in California, and access to it will not be possible at least until 2007. It includes letters, papers and drawings that cover the period comprised between 1956 and 1979; a presentation of the contents is available at <http://www.oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/tf6j49n98n>. There is at least one more collection stored in the reserved area of the National Library of México, (*Biblioteca Nacional en México*), composed as well by original drawings, which we have also been unable to check.

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