

A trip by plane or by boat

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Olmec colossal heads, the Aztecs, the Maya on the other side of the world, the Maori in the heart of Mexico's historical center, the Czars of Russia in an emblematic enclosure of the Reforma Avenue, or more than 30 thousand silver coins recovered after 200 years from Spanish waters. These are just a few examples of how different cultures move –flying or sailing– from one country to another, from one continent to another. An inevitable journey that a cultural asset must make to be presented in a temporary exhibition.

The main objective: to generate an encounter, a moment of awe and amazement, between the ancient civilizations and different audiences of the world.

The exhibition of art inevitably favored by the museums themselves. Nowadays, it is very common that large cultural venues lend their collections to small museums or museums located in countries where they had not previously had a presence. In the field of international cooperation, it is completely valid and even usual for culture to be a key element in governments' agendas, not only because it is the basic component of discussion and reflection in foreign cultural policy, but also as a way to promote the understanding of the other cultures, as well as empathy towards others.

An exhibition is a cultural event capable of acting as a tool for generating dialogue between people and a recurring resource for social cohesion and compression, aspects that are so necessary nowadays.



However, it is not an easy task to be able to present the large collections of the world in Mexico. There are even cases in which museums are no longer willing to lend their collections, either due to the obligatory presence of the artifacts and artwork on their museological discourse or simply, for conservation reasons. Despite this, experts and professionals in the field of international cultural exchange have been given the task of making this possible, and for more than four decades, this great work has been professionalized in the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH), through the Coordinación Nacional de Museos y Exposiciones (CNME).

The interest of communicating and publicizing the cultural diversity of Mexico and the world are just a few guiding lines that INAH constantly encourages through its mission: the dissemination of the archaeological and historical heritage of Mexico abroad and viceversa, thus promoting cultural exchange between nations. When this dialogue generates, the temporary exhibitions become a mean of communication that allows publicizing the cultural treasures of other territories, in a context and with an artistic intention different from those originally found in the permanent exhibitions of the museums. This new setting inevitably encourages a new reading, which allows the visitor to expand the context and deepen the understanding of other worlds as well as the identification of cultural heritage.

Organizing and managing exhibitions of this nature, in a world that changes so quickly is undoubtedly a challenge. However and even though people's interests are constantly changing, foreign masterpieces and cultures will always be interesting for a large part of the world population.

The process: a defined list of actions that range from the official request of the artwork to the closing of the display case that will be in the exhibition, going through specific areas of management and strategic planning such as packaging, insurance, and transit —air, land or maritime— of cultural heritage. This is an interesting task, with a very high legal and conservation responsibility, but above all, an enormous social responsibility, because it will be through the visitor's experience that we will know if the hard work prior to the exhibition of a work that had never been on Mexican soil before, or in a distant country such as Slovenia, Japan, France, Spain, Australia, New Zealand, Brazil or Argentina, has been rewarded.

The team: a group of professional people with specific functions that work behind the scenes; a team that specializes, studies, develops and organizes in the best way possible in order to exhibit the great selection of pieces, with a personality that even requires persuasion when, to name just one example, at the crucial moment of an exhibition such as assembly, we must explain why in Mexico we do not have certain material that is used in Egypt, while the spoken language is English and not the mother tongue of any of the teams. In those moments of negotiation, the updated knowledge and personality of those who make up the team is very important for the good development of the project.

The multidisciplinary team that prepares and improves along with each project, is located in an office at the Dirección de Exposiciones of the Coordinación Nacional de Museos y Exposiciones, and has the diligence of showing to Mexico and the rest of the world, our archaeological and colonial wonders. This team undoubtedly believes that if the visitor could imagine the complicated and arduous work behind the organization of an exhibition, prior to the cutting of the inaugural ribbon, and knew the daily work that the international exhibitions section does, would be impressed by all the care and details to consider, with the single objective that their visit happens in a friendly space where they are free to see, observe and admire objects for mere pleasure or knowledge.



This great team has participated in the organization and staging of international exhibitions over many decades, hand in hand with other working groups of the Dirección de Museos and Dirección Técnica, along with the National Coordinator of the CNME, as well as restorers who are part of the team and the support and contribution of the Coordinación Nacional de Conservación del Patrimonio Cultural (CNCPC). The learning continues with the most important value as a standard, which is undoubtedly the respect for cultural heritage.



Figure 1. Teotihuacan, City of water, city of fire. *Image: ©CNME-INAH, 2008.*

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