

RELIGIOUS ART MUSEUM, EX-CONVENT OF SANTA MONICA

Puebla

/ HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The founding of the former convent of Santa Monica has its antecedents in the early seventeenth century, with the establishment of the Santa María Magdalena Cloisters; nevertheless, it was not until the end of that century when Bishop Manuel Fernández de Santa Cruz received permission to build the Convent of Santa Monica, which operated as such for almost 250 years until its final closure in the third decade of the twentieth century, when it became the repository of assets seized from the Church in Puebla. Soon after, it became the first Religious Art Museum in Mexico, remaining open to the public for sixty-five years until the restructuring project of the Museum of Santa Mónica. This began in 2000 and was finished at the end of 2007, when it was temporarily closed for meticulous and thorough restoration work on the building and much of its collection. It reopened on December 19, 2011, and is still open today.



/ The former convent of Santa Monica, today the Religious Art Museum is, due to its collection, one of the greatest examples of female monastic life in the country and unique in the state of Puebla. Due to its architecture, it is one of the most complete convents from the Viceroyalty that has been preserved.

/ SERVICES

The Museum of Santa Monica offers visitors the option of being accompanied by a guide during their visit to the museum. To ensure the best service, request the guided tour in advance. Address enquiries to the following e-mail address: santamonicaeducativos @gmail.com or by calling 01 (222) 232 0178.
There are ramps, a platform, and an elevator for greater accessibility.

/$ ADMISSION

According to the Federal Fees Act, admission is free for students, teachers, and seniors with a valid ID, children under 13 and disabled people.
Sundays: free admission for Mexicans and foreign residents.

/ HOW TO GET THERE

18 poniente 103, Centro Histórico, C.P. 72000
Puebla, Puebla.
Tel. 01 (222) 232 0178.
santamonicapuebla
@inah.gob.mx

/ PHOTOGRAPHY

For the use of any device to make videos, visitors must pay a fee. Non-professional photography, without the use of tripods, is free of charge and must be done without a flash.

/ HOURS

Tuesday to Sunday from 10:00 am to 5:00 pm

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/ MAIN ATTRACTION

Religious Allegory: Submitting the Constitutions

Signed by Marimón in 1722. The theme and its iconographic elements refer to the appearance of the Virgin giving the chain to Saint Monica, a symbol that distinguished the confraternities built under this name in the leading Augustinian monasteries and convents in Europe and the Americas. They also refer to Saint Augustine, writing the Rules and Constitutions governing the community life of the Augustinian Recollect Religious Order of Santa Monica of the City of Puebla; three white veiled nuns, four maidens who wear brown uniforms, and a series of black veiled nuns are represented in the lower part of the canvas.

Where to see it?

This majestic canvas can be viewed on the upper floor in Room 20: Allegories and Patronage.



/ COLLECTIONS

The museum's collection of sacred art is primarily composed of four collections of historical convents in the city of Puebla: Santa Catalina (of the Dominican order), San Joaquín and Santa Ana (Capuchins), La Soledad (Barefoot Carmelites) and Santa Mónica (Augustinian Recollects), making it one of the greatest centers of female monastic life from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries.

Its collection of more than five thousand pieces includes wood and polychromed, gilded, and tooled sculptures, richly embroidered textiles, liturgical objects, objects of daily convent life, and paintings. It represents a large sample of local artistic production and features colonial period artists such as Juan Tinoco, Pascual Pérez, Juan de Villalobos, Luis Berrueco, Miguel Jerónimo de Zendejas, Joseph Patricio Polo, José de Páez, Andrés López, Miguel Cabrera, Lorenzo Zendejas, and Rafael Morante.

/ HIGHLIGHTS

1688 On May 24, 1688, the first Profession took place in the Convent of Santa Monica, where twenty-four nuns took vows to devote themselves to the cloistered life of poverty, obedience, and chastity.

1821 In 1821 the nuns prepared the dish known as *chiles en nogada* (stuffed peppers in nut sauce) for Agustín de Iturbide in tribute after culminating Independence from Spain, dressing this dish as the tricolored flag.

1934 On May 18, 1934, the Augustinian nuns were definitively forced to leave, whereupon the seized building served as a repository for the personal property of other religious buildings.

1935 In 1935 the former convent of Santa Mónica became a Religious Art Museum, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Finance and Public Credit (SHCP) and the Directorate of National Assets of Puebla.

1940 In 1940 the Religious Art Museum Ex-Convent of Santa Mónica joined the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia.

/EXHIBITIONS

This magnificent historical building has two interior patios, that of the Nuns and that of the Novices; twenty-three permanent exhibition halls are arranged around these patios and are divided into meeting and thematic halls.

The halls offer a window into daily life and the cloistering of nuns who lived there, the architecture of each room speaks of the convent's operations and the importance of its conservation. Among these rooms we find: bathing chambers, a kitchen, pantry, refectory, chapterhouse, library, antechoir, lower choir and upper choir, cell, and the prioress's office.

The thematic halls bring together important pieces that represent the development and legacy of arts in New Spain and the philosophical and theological thought of the time. Among these are: The Viceroyalty of Puebla de los Ángeles, Daily Life, Life of Saint Augustine, the Prayer and Work Hall, Reliquaries, Hagiographic Passages, Allegories and Patronages, Velvets by Rafael Morante, Marian Devotion, Crowned Nuns, and the Mystics Hall.

● Ground floor

Bathing chambers (Hall 3). This setting is one of the few of its kind, because it is a service area (bathrooms) that is rarely valued architecturally as an area to be preserved, however, here there are bathtubs said to be for "pleasure," which were used only two to three times a month.

Kitchen (Hall 5). Of great architectural and gastronomic worth, the convent kitchen is where the mixture of ingredients led to the creation of exquisite dishes to delight members of the colonial elite, such as *chiles en nogada*, as well as a variety of complex dishes that spread beyond convent walls and that have been handed down to us as heritage worthy of preservation.

Refectory (Hall 7). The nuns came to this space to "restore" their body and spirit. Before entering that room, they had to cleanse their bodies by washing their hands in a basin at the entrance, and the spirit, through meditation. While the nuns and novices fed their body, the prioress chose a nun to read aloud passages from the Bible or the biography of one of the saints.

Library (Hall 10). The prioress appointed a nun as head of the library, who in addition to keeping the books clean and tidy, was in charge of lending them. The nuns requested books to consult them privately, either in the courtyard or in their cells. This library has copies of choir and music, popular songs for celebrations of the Virgin and other saints, books of religious instruction and moral life, and, catechisms and *novenas*. There are also sermons, and religious and devotional poetry.



GROUND FLOOR

1. *The Viceroyalty in Puebla de los Ángeles*
2. *Daily Life*
3. *Bathing chambers*
4. *Patio of the Nuns*
5. *Kitchen*
6. *Pantry*
7. *Refectory*
8. *Patio of the Novices*
9. *Chapterhouse*
10. *Library*
11. *Lower Antechoir*
12. *Lower Choir*

UPPER FLOOR

13. *Upper Choir*
14. *Upper Antechoir*
15. *Life of Saint Augustine*
16. *Prayer and Work Hall*
17. *Reliquaries*
18. *Cell*
19. *Hagiographic Passages*
20. *Allegories and Patronage*
21. *Office of the Prioress*
22. *Velvets by Rafael Morante*
23. *Marian Hall*
24. *Crowned Nuns*

Lower Choir (Hall 12). Convents in New Spain required special architecture that responded to the needs of the nuns living there, and those of the faithful who came to the church. Choirs are distinctive features in these convent constructions; they were quadrangular architectural spaces of sufficient dimensions to allow the nuns to listen and take part in religious services from there without being seen by the parishioners.



● Upper floor

Upper Choir (Hall 13). Rectangular in plan, this choir has a series of niches for sculptures or reliquaries and, in the back, a neoclassical altar. At the opposite end, there is a wrought iron grille, covered on the side of the church with a cloth screen, which allowed the nuns to see the mass from the inside. Choirs were considered the central element of nuns' churches: the very life of the convent began in them. In the upper choir, the Divine Office began with prayers at dawn, the first hour of the new day. In community the nuns settled in chairs or on benches arranged around the perimeter. During the rest of the day they returned to this place to continue their prayers according to the liturgy of the hours.

Life of Saint Augustine (Hall 15). This thematic hall houses fourteen oil paintings illustrating the life and death of Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo and Doctor of the Church, from whom they took their teachings as the basis for the rules of the order.

Reliquaries (Hall 17). Because of their "miraculous" character, relics were and are considered a protection against evil and a means to ask for the intercession of a saint before God. In the Santa Mónica collection a good number of them are preserved, evidence of the practices and beliefs of the nuns who lived in this convent, as well as the society to which they belonged.

Cell (Hall 18). In this space, today modified, there were once the individual cells of the nuns who lived in the convent. According to the vow of poverty they had taken, the walls (whitewashed with lime) were free of decoration; at most a simple crucifix reminded them of the sacrifice of the Son of God. It shows how the private spaces of the nuns would originally have been.

Velvets by Rafael Morante (Hall 22). This room exhibits a series of large-scale paintings from the first half of the nineteenth century that represent five moments in the life of Christ They are unique for the artist's technique; Rafael Morante, originally from Cholula, used oil on velvet to create a sensation of movement and perspective.

Crowned Nuns (Hall 24). The canvases exhibited here belong to the iconographic genre known as "crowned nuns." Profession and death represent the two moments when the nuns were adorned with a crown, bouquets, and crucifixes or candles. When a nun died, if she was virtuous or had been outstanding for her piety, the community entrusted her portrait to a painter.