

Box 951549, Los Angeles, California 90095-1549
phone 310/825.4288
fax 310/206.7007
www.fowler.ucla.edu

Department of Marketing and Communications

Stacey Ravel Abarbanel
staceyra@arts.ucla.edu
310/825.4288

Stacey Ravel Abarbanel, staceyra@arts.ucla.edu
310/825-4288

For Immediate Use

Silver Seduction: The Art of Mexican Modernist Antonio Pineda
August 24, 2008–March 15, 2009

In the mountain town of Taxco in Mexico's state of Guerrero, large-scale mining can be dated to the sixteenth century, and silver is a way of life. In the years following the Mexican Revolution (1910–20), jewelry and other silver objects were crafted there with an entirely innovative approach, informed by modernism and the creation of a new Mexican national identity. Today, at the age of 89, Antonio Pineda is one of two living members of the Taxco School and is recognized as a world-class designer and a Mexican national treasure. Nearly two hundred examples of Pineda's acclaimed silver work will be displayed in *Silver Seduction: The Art of Mexican Modernist Antonio Pineda*, a traveling exhibition debuting at the Fowler Museum Aug. 24, 2008.

Significantly, given Pineda's many accomplishments and international renown, he identifies himself primarily as a taxqueño, or Taxco, silversmith. From its inception, the Taxco movement broke new ground in technical achievement and design. While American-born, Taxco-based designer William Spratling has been credited with spearheading the contemporary Taxco silver movement, it was a group of talented Mexican designers who went on to establish independent workshops and develop the distinctive "Taxco School." These designers incorporated numerous aesthetic orientations—Pre-Columbian art; silverwork, religious images, and other artwork from the Mexican Colonial period; and local popular arts—merging them within the broad spectrum of modernism.

Pineda himself is lauded for his bold designs and ingenious use of gemstones. *Silver Seduction* traces the evolution of his work from the 1930s–70s, and includes more than fifty each of necklaces and bracelets, as well as numerous beautiful rings, earrings and diverse examples of his hollowware and tableware. All of the works feature Pineda's hard-to-achieve combination of highly refined execution and hand-wrought appeal.

Pineda's jewelry is especially known for its elegant acknowledgment of the human form. It is often said that a Pineda fits the body perfectly, that it feels right when it is worn. So, for example, a thick geometric necklace that might at first glance seem too weighty or rigid to wear comfortably is, in fact, faceted, hinged, or hollowed in such a way that it gracefully encircles the neck or drapes seductively down the décolletage.

In addition, no other taxqueño jeweler used as many costly semiprecious stones or set them with as much ingenuity, skill, and variety as did Pineda. Only the most talented of silversmiths could master

the unique challenges posed by setting gemstones in silver at the high temperature necessary to work the metal. Pineda, however, managed to set gems with as little metal touching them as possible, giving them a free or floating look while still holding them firmly in place. In Pineda's hands, some stones were embedded; rows of gems were set close together to emphasize the structural lines of a design; or stones were cut to fit irregular shapes in a design. Pineda often used cultured pearls, large amethyst drops, and onyx in his designs, many examples of which are on display in the exhibition.

Art After the Revolution

The Mexican Revolution made glaringly apparent the country's many ethnic, linguistic, and political divisions. As a consequence, when it ended, the unification of the country and the forging of a national identity became urgent political goals. While during the thirty-five-year dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, Mexico's culture had followed European tastes—particularly the organic, flowing, and curvilinear aesthetic of Art Nouveau—artists after the revolution looked to local, distinctly Mexican sources of inspiration.

Governmental and educational programs encouraged contemporary artists, such as Diego Rivera, José Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, to portray Mexico's deep cultural roots before the Spanish Conquest. Around the same time, interest in Pre-Columbian Mexico was heightened by several important archaeological discoveries at Monte Albán and Teotihuacán, news of which was followed closely by the Mexican public, scholars, politicians, and artists. These nationalist efforts fueled the Mexican modernist movement, which the Taxco silversmiths fully embraced.

Taxco silversmiths appropriated elements of the ancient design vocabularies from such sources as Pre-Columbian codices, ceramics, and architectural monuments. They successfully combined the simplified, abstracted forms that characterized Pre-Columbian art with the geometric motifs of Art Deco. With this innovative melding of ancient and contemporary styles, they created a new modern Mexican aesthetic.

Taxco and the Taxco School

By the late 1920s, Taxco had become a destination for countless Mexican and international travelers. The U. S. ambassador to Mexico at the time, Dwight W. Morrow, encouraged his friend Spratling to open a silver workshop. Two master goldsmiths from the nearby town of Iguala, Artemio Navarrete and Alfonso Mondragón, came to work at Spratling's Taller de las Delicias (Workshop of the Delights) and were encouraged to experiment with silver. Young taxqueños apprenticed in the shop—Pineda was among the first—and when they graduated from the tutelage of Mondragón and Navarete they became teachers to new apprentices. The Taxco school emerged from this dynamic milieu.

By the late 1930s, silversmiths had begun to leave Las Delicias to establish their own businesses. They promised Spratling not to reproduce his designs, and in doing so set the stage for a surge of creativity. The dozen or so smiths whose large talleres came to cater to ever-increasing numbers of international visitors pushed against conservative and historic design conventions, developing distinctive identities while at the same time evolving a Taxco oeuvre. Pineda's own taller was so successful and his designs in such high demand that his original staff of ten smiths eventually grew to one hundred.

The beauty of Taxco itself—with narrow, cobblestone lanes lined by whitewashed houses with red-tiled roofs—initially attracted artists and writers such as Sherwood Anderson, Joseph Conrad, Miguel Covarrubias, William Faulkner, Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, and David Alfaro Siqueiros, who all spent time there. All were friends of Spratling. Subsequent waves of visitors ebbed and flowed over the years with the building of new roads and the lure of an “exotic” experience.

By the late 1940s and 1950s, picturesque Taxco became a vacation favorite for the Hollywood set, and later a film location, as well. Stars—including Bette Davis, Marilyn Monroe, Rita Hayworth, Linda

Darnell, Marlene Dietrich, Maria Félix, Dolores del Rio, Jack Palance, Mario Moreno (Cantinflas), and Barbara Stanwyck—writers, producers, and others in the film industry frequented the town and, of course, purchased silver. The influx of wealthy visitors from Hollywood and elsewhere was impetus for a luxury hotel boom, which in turn contributed to driving up silver production and sales.

Over time Pineda added master smiths to his taller, which encouraged even greater experimentation. These talented employees exploited increasingly sophisticated techniques and pushed their skills to the limits. Pineda credits Bruno Pineda, Rafael “Chino” Ruiz, José María “Chema” Pineda, and Filiberto Gómez for the new levels to which his work and business soared in the 1950s and 1960s.

The remarkable creativity of this “Silver Renaissance” era represents a unique moment in history. The design and quality of Pineda’s and his colleagues’ modernist works stand in sharp contrast to the sometimes imported and hastily made silver jewelry that is now marketed en mass in Taxco. While a small group of fine designers still create hand-wrought silver, by and large Taxco silver today lacks the design sensibility and technical virtuosity of Pineda’s era.

Additional Information

Gobi Stromberg, an anthropologist and independent scholar specializing in the Taxco silver industry, is consulting curator of *Silver Seduction: The Art of Mexican Modernist Antonio Pineda*, in collaboration with a curatorial team at the Fowler Museum. The exhibition is drawn from the collection of Cindy Tietze and Stuart Hodosh of Los Angeles, who have collected the artist’s work for the past thirty years and have gifted a selection of works in the exhibition to the Fowler Museum’s permanent collection. The book *Silver Seduction: The Art of Mexican Modernist Antonio Pineda* (ISBN 978-0-9778344-0-2) will be published in conjunction with the exhibition in fall of 2008.

This exhibition is made possible through the generosity of Jill and Barry Kitnick and the Donald B. Cordry Fund. Additional support was provided by the Yvonne Lenart Public Programs Fund, the UCLA Center for Latin American Studies, and Manus, the support group of the Fowler Museum at UCLA.

The Fowler is open Wednesdays through Sundays, from noon to 5 p.m.; and on Thursdays, from noon until 8 p.m. The museum is closed Mondays and Tuesdays. The Fowler Museum, part of UCLA Arts, is located in the north part of the UCLA campus. Admission is free. Parking is available for a maximum of \$9 in Lot 4. For more information, the public may call 310/825-4361 or visit fowler.ucla.edu.