

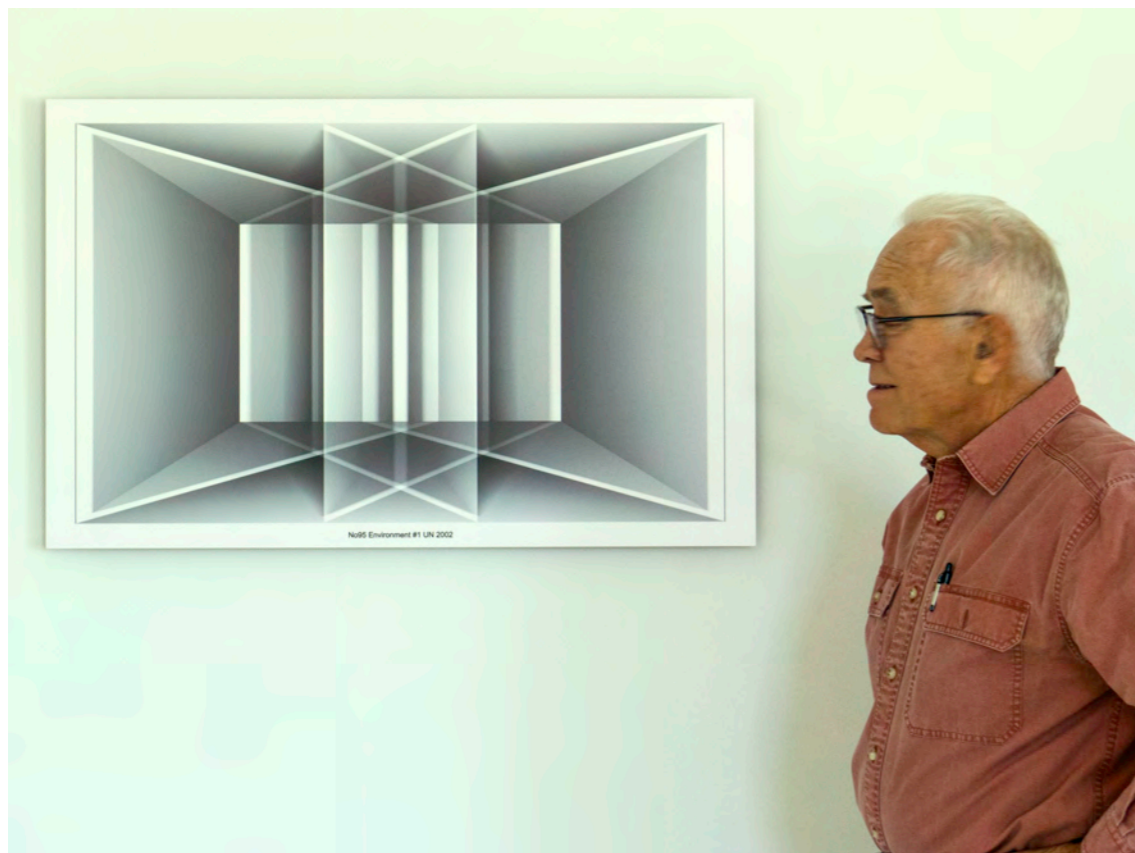


return from mexico 2025

Sunday, April 20, 2025

For some two hours I drove in a blinding dust storm towards and into El Paso and by sheer instinct I turned off at the correct spot and there was my destination, Motel 6, where I intended to spend the last night before heading home to Santa Fe. Leaving Jimenez in the morning, crossing the border in Ojinaga, hoping to avoid endless waiting in Juarez, may have been a mistake, adding some three hours additional driving. But the crossing was uneventful except for the friendly exchange with the border official, a native of Brooklyn, exchanging views of living in New York then and now, then meaning before his time, leaving Broome street in Soho 1989 for Mexico. Having walked through ferocious wind and dust to the nearest source of food I hastily took the bag handed to me with my choice of dinner and made it back to my hotel room, where I discovered to have missed picking up any utensils. A paper cup in the bathroom, torn up for the purpose, served as spoon to the miserable edibles listed as a tacos. A quick shower later I fell asleep. Thirsty and hungry I drove early next morning, no more dust, just wind, into a McDonald parking lot, only to be utterly confused in front of a computerized ordering screen and gave up. Twice more I missed the entrance drive to other McDonalds and put my hope enjoying a breakfast muffin with coffee in Truth and Confidence. But that place has changed unrecognizably since I visited last, and after driving the length and width of the town I headed back to the thruway when at the very end of town, a McDonald. A young waitress noticed my confusion and asking how I intended to pay, cash or card, typed my order into the god forsaken machine, cappuccino was not to be had, so ordinary coffee had to do. Satisfied with food and drink but mixed feelings of being back in the US, I drove off. No topes, no potholes, a perfect road ahead eased that feeling. At five past one o'clock April 18th I drove into my garage.

Tom in Guadalupe



I left Santa Fe February 28. From El Paso I took two days to reach Zacatecas, spending a night in Jimenez. To find the way to Tom's house in Guadalupe became a nightmare. Nobody seemed to know the way but seeing a tow truck on the roadside I asked the driver to call Tom, tell him where I was and to pick me up. That worked. Erika knew the location, brought Tom, who switched cars and then followed her back to the house.

Monday we discussed the estimates I had gotten for casting a relief intended for the house and the idea to have it done in Mexico instead. Tuesday we started the search for a 3D printer. The first telephone number in Aguascalientes did not answer, the second did. Luis at the cadsurfer spoke some English, but Tom took over and explained. We emailed the computer files and asked for an estimate, which Luis sent the next day. Thursday we visited the cadsurfer, were impressed by the staff and work done and signed the order. Luis had arranged to also meet with a foundry, but the limited size capacity, which would have necessitated casting in sections, did not convince us, nor did the high estimate. When I returned to Guadalupe April 12 a different foundry had been consulted by Yarvick, the owner of cadsurfer, and Tom had made an appointment for April 15. The three of us spent time in the foundry discussing issues and are now waiting for an estimate. I left the next day.

Since I had made arrangements to visit Vivienne, an old friend from New York, in San Miguel de Allende Sunday March 9, plans were made to have an early birthday dinner in an Argentinian restaurant followed with more at home.

March 08 in Zacatecas





Erika, Chris, Tom

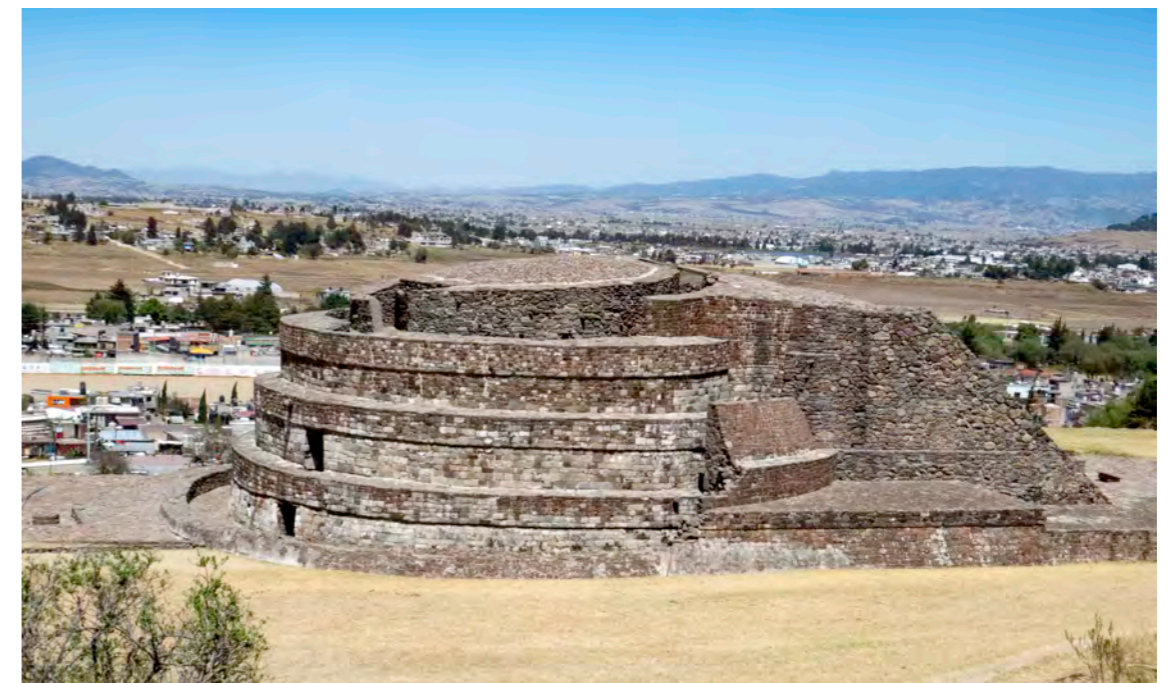
From One Hotel in Toluca I had taken an Uber into Mexico City. The first gallery on my list was closed, so the lady on the intercom. Two others seemed to have vanished or changed addresses. One supposedly represented the estates of Angela Gurria and Helen Escobedo, two artists I had met in 1981. Alexander von Wuthenau had introduced us. Standing in front of one more phantom address another gringo recommended the gallery next door not on my list, Alejandra Topete, and walked off with no further exchange. I walked through a small courtyard into a house, passing a reception desk, and entered the first exhibition room showing a large tapestry. Exhausted I sat on a chair in a corner viewing the artwork when I heard footsteps descending a staircase and Alejandra entered the room. A lively conversation followed, the tapestry having been woven in a women cooperative in Oaxaca, work from there I had seen before. We walked through the gallery with her talking about the artists and their work on display. She then invited me to the restoration studio to see more work of Claribel Calderius and one other Cuban artist. Mentioning that I was looking for a foundry casting in aluminum as well as CNC capabilities in Mexico, Alejandra wrote down names and telephone numbers of two people I should contact. Unfortunately my iPhone was not set up to do that as I discovered later and a message asking for e-mail addresses instead remained unanswered. One more address without a gallery and I gave up and decided to call an Uber back to Toluca. By then I had no Wi-Fi connection, nor was I sure about my location in the city. A friendly police woman clarified where I was, then called Uber on my behalf, waiting with me till I was safely on my way. Once more I passed through residential affluence as well as others and could breath normally after arriving at my hotel. At a little restaurant next door, not mentioned by the hotel reception, serving the local workforce it seemed, one choice of food only, I was treated by now as a valued customer, the owner speaking fluent English having worked long enough in New York.



Vivienne's house

The day before, on my way from San Miguel de Allende, I had visited Calixtlahuaca. In 1975 the Ehecatl temple stood alone in a field where children sold obsidian fragments and small terracotta heads, now the place is well guarded, with a museum, which was closed. Explaining to the woman in charge that I had visited the site many years ago, when there was no museum, she invited me in and guided me through the place.

Calixtlahuaca



Without Wi-Fi it became difficult to find my way direction Toluca. At a VW station a friendly employe put me back on Wi-Fi and since the One Hotel is close to the airport I also followed signs and reached it without further delay. Chalcatzingo was my next goal. In February 2024 I had been incapable to walk beyond the guardhouse when visiting with Tom because of Covid, not so now.

Chalcatzingo



Edzna

The next day I made it to the hotel Arcos in Acayucan, which I remembered from the year before, but missed the turnoffs to La Venta and Comalcalco next morning. Champoton was my destination for the night. Eating a delicious, spicy dish of camarones, I was able to enjoy the moonlit view of the golf of Mexico and a close by island briefly but rhythmically through the narrow spaces between trucks passing in endless succession.

This time I reached Edzna early in the day and so avoided the midday heat. The site impresses by seize and architectural complexity. The central platform with a somewhat diagonal line on one side of the otherwise rectangular shape at the top of the layout had intrigued me in 1974 and I had measured and drawn the platform which upset the then sole guard greatly, as by his understanding I was taking something out of the archaeological zone and with me. My attempt to appease him by pointing at my camera and thereby the photos I was also taking with me, did not appease him since he could not see the pictures and had no understanding of a camera. When he retreated to his hut to think things over, I packed up and left. This time the diagonal had been straitened out for symmetry sake or better understanding. For me the platform had lost some mystery.

First in Oxkutzcab and also in Ticul no hotel room could be found, some holiday ha filled the towns with visitors. Back in Oxkutzcab an elderly lady at a gas station directed me to a somewhat neglected hotel with two rooms left, I took one unseen and paid for two nights 800 pesos. Around the corner a hip cafe-restaurant served very good scrambled eggs with toast and cappuccino. I enjoyed an equally satisfying breakfast in the morning before taking off for Labna, Xlapak, Sayil and Kabah.



Edzna



Labna



Labna

Labna



Labna





Kabah

Uxmal I left out this time, fearing legions of tourists, other Puuc sites for feeling exhausted. I called my painter friend Ralf Walter in Chicxulub, got proper directions and in the early afternoon drove into his little compound. Viewing his work, discussing politics in Europe, Mexico as well as recent events in the US filled the days besides walking the beach, eating grilled fish nearby. Another guest, French, arrived from researching women issues in a Mayan village in Quintana Roo, added to our live and talk. Four days later I took off.

Chicxulub



The plan was to meet my pilot friend Christian somewhere between Coba and Tulum. Not specifying Coba archaeological zone in Maps directed me towards a village named Coba way out in the bush, near the research location of Ralf's lady friend I had just met. In a small, thatched roofed store a young Mayan girl called for an equally young looking Spanish-speaking boy, who with smiles and enthusiasm redirected me towards my destination. From Coba archaeological zone I called Christian, who directed me to the village Francisco Uh May, from where I called again and in due time he drove up in his pickup next to me and following him into the jungle arrived at the little paradise his wife Monika had designed and built. No guests were expected and I moved into one of the rentals. Monika being Argentinian, a sumptuous feast of various grilled meats followed, the Mexican wine too was delicious. I was interested in the composition of the stucco the floor and walls were made off, harder than normal plaster - stucco, but only learned a mixture of plaster and some sap from trees made it this hard. Probably an old Mayan recipe.

After they left for their home in Playa del Carmen I stayed two more days, then headed for Kohunlich.



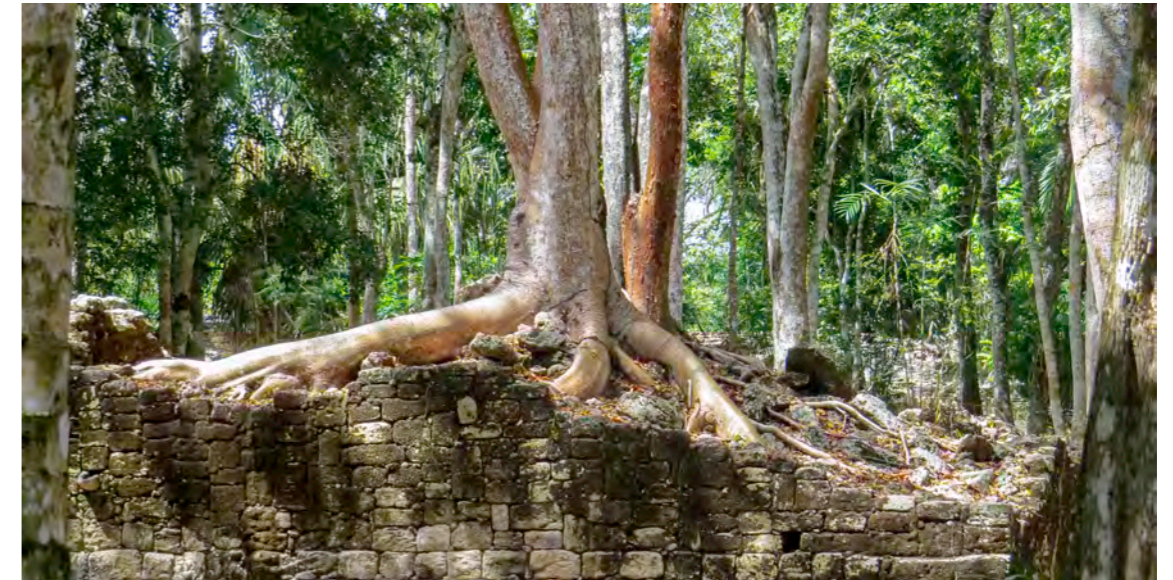
In 1981 I had met Victor Segovia Pinto at his sister's apartment in New York. He spoke of Kohunlich and his work there. He invited me to come and visit the ruins. Unfortunately when I did, he was in Mexico City. The site is huge and this time I did not cover the whole, just parts in my memory. The architectural layout is phenomenal, stairs on one side, deep cliffs on the other indicate a complex landscape into which the structures were placed. I met only two other visitors and even the howling monkeys seemed absent.



Kohunlich

My intention had been to spend a couple of nights in Xpujil and explore a number of ruins, but the hotel, once found, seemed desolate and a sign informed the restaurant to be closed. Deeply disappointed since I had good memories of the place, I gave up and decided to drive all the way to Escarcega to find a proper hotel and eatery. That dream quickly evaporated once there. It was getting dark and the hotel with imposing facade turned out anything but that. One more room seemed to be occupied, one other had the floor removed by breaking the floor tiles with hammers till I complained at the front desk about the intolerable noise and the crew of two had an early evening at nine o'clock. The toilet without seat did work and after a careful search I discovered what went as a towel, but no soap.

Standing in front contemplating a Cafe, the owner hastily opened the door and begged me in. The menu card offered pasta Bolognese and I decided to eat for once not Mexican. Bad idea. The pasta consisted of penne and the Bolognese of refried beans. I asked for cerveza, Victoria, which a boy was sent out and came back with two cans. At least they were authentic. In a small grocery store I found some Carlos V chocolate and some potato chips to kill the memory of the Bolognese and went to sleep.



Kohunlich

Next morning I drove past a string of good looking hotels outside of town. At 3pm in Villahermosa I had enough of driving. Having passed the Viva hotel and nothing much else, I found my way back, and compensating for last nights shortcomings, checked in. After unpacking and a shower I settled in the restaurant to a civilized meal, a fish fillet á la Veracruz, while other guests were plunging in the swimming pool outside. Ready to leave the next morning my car battery was dead, I had forgotten to disconnect the cooler box, filled with bottles of Victoria, which had drained the battery over night. Two parking attendant brought the car back to live when Tom happened to call. Speaking Spanish, he asked one attendant to take me to an Auto Zone store and have the battery checked before taking off to avoid a possible break down in some wilderness. He also negotiated a 100 pesos compensation for the man's service. All this done, the battery having been found to be in good shape, I took off for Comalcalco.

Alas, the museum, my reason for this time's visit, was closed again. Massive construction work on the visiting center being the reason. The walk through the ruins I kept short. La Venta I decided not to visit at all, remembering last years disappointment to find the place heavily overgrown, the government funds having been severely cut, so the explanation of the man in charge.

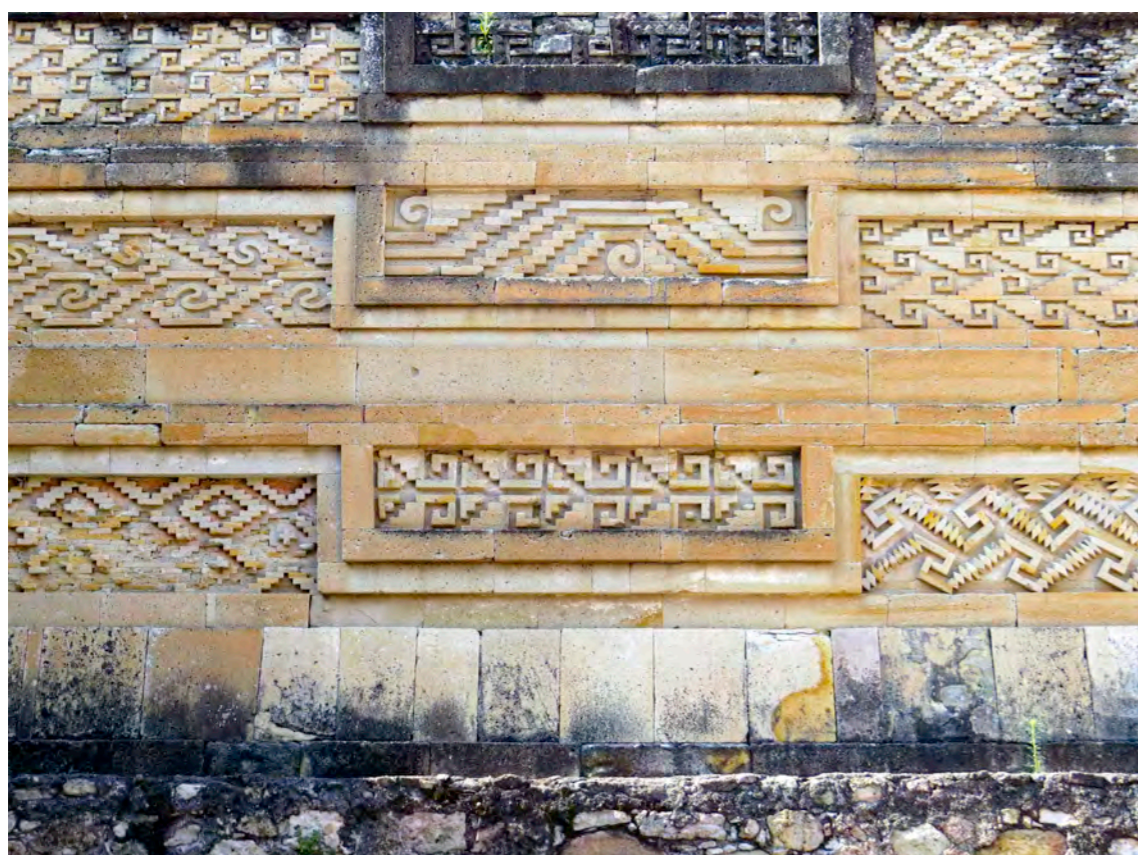
Then trouble struck. One wrong turn and I got lost. Realizing my mistake I made a U-turn were I should not and noticed too late two police on motorbikes. With sirens blaring and lights flashing I was brought to a halt. The infraction would cost 2000 pesos one of the police told me after asking for my license. He held my drivers license and clearly wasn't giving it back without compensation. I told him that I was lost, where I was heading and pulled out my wallet, took out 1800 pesos, showed him that was all I had. The second police, standing somewhat back, grabbed the bills out of my hand and put them in his pocket. That was it. Again in possession of my license, I started the car and with two police as escort I reached the correct turn-off which the front police signaled for me to take.

I reached Acayucan and the Arcos hotel as it was getting dark. The next morning, to replenish my purse, I had to try three banks till at the third, the City Banamex, the cash machine accepted my card and I could head for Mitla.

To avoid heavy traffic on mountain passes caused by overloaded trucks going at three miles an hour or so, I decided to drive across the isthmus towards Salina Cruz and head for Oaxaca. The concept of building a rail link across the isthmus with harbors on the Atlantic and the Pacific side, thereby making the Panama canal obsolete, seems for once a most profitable government plan for Mexico.

The incredibly curvy road to Mitla is a remarkable feat of engineering with breathtaking views, which I had enjoyed the year before when Tom did the driving. This time I had to keep my eyes on the road. I checked into my hotel for two nights, found the restaurant we had enjoyed the year before and had a most delicious chicken mole dish. Now, free of Covid, I spend sufficient time to photograph and view the site. Another wonderful meal at my favorite restaurant had to do till dinner time in Oaxaca.

Mitla



A hotel with parking I found in walking distance of the plaza, but after eating at the plaza I could not find it again. I had left the hotel with the room key in my pocket not realizing only the room number was marked on it's label. I had no address or name but as visual reference a church facing the end of the road and a laundry next door to the hotel.

Walking in endless circles, trying to remember any additional landmarks, I finally asked at a hotel with a laundry next door for help. All I remembered was that laundry and the view of a church, only a different hotel. The good man shared my mystification, and together we went meticulously over my memories as well as maps on his cell phone, when he remembered that at the very end of the street happened to be a very small hotel also next to a laundry. I had not walked far enough to the end of the street and when I did, I saw my car in the courtyard and felt vindicated.

The next day, March 30, having discovered the old familiar hotel from a year ago, I moved to the Valle de Oaxaca, the walk to the plaza being even shorter. A brief view in the early evening over the line of restaurant and I chose a table for two in a corner with clear view at the plaza, which remained my favored spot for the time in town. There seemed to be no shortage of tourists and sitting there long enough made it clear a portion of the public rotated rhythmically around the plaza showing off their most precious. Not before finishing a second Victoria and having watched a few rotations I returned to the Valle de Oaxaca.

Atzompa



Atzompa was a disappointment. In 2015 a major section was under restoration and not accessible, no photos allowed. That part of the zone was still blocked off, if not even more, Monte Alban visible in a haze in the distance. Leaving the village at the bottom of the hill I intended to explore the neighborhood, which I did by getting lost, but driving through villages multiple times in search of a road out, I became familiar with local life.

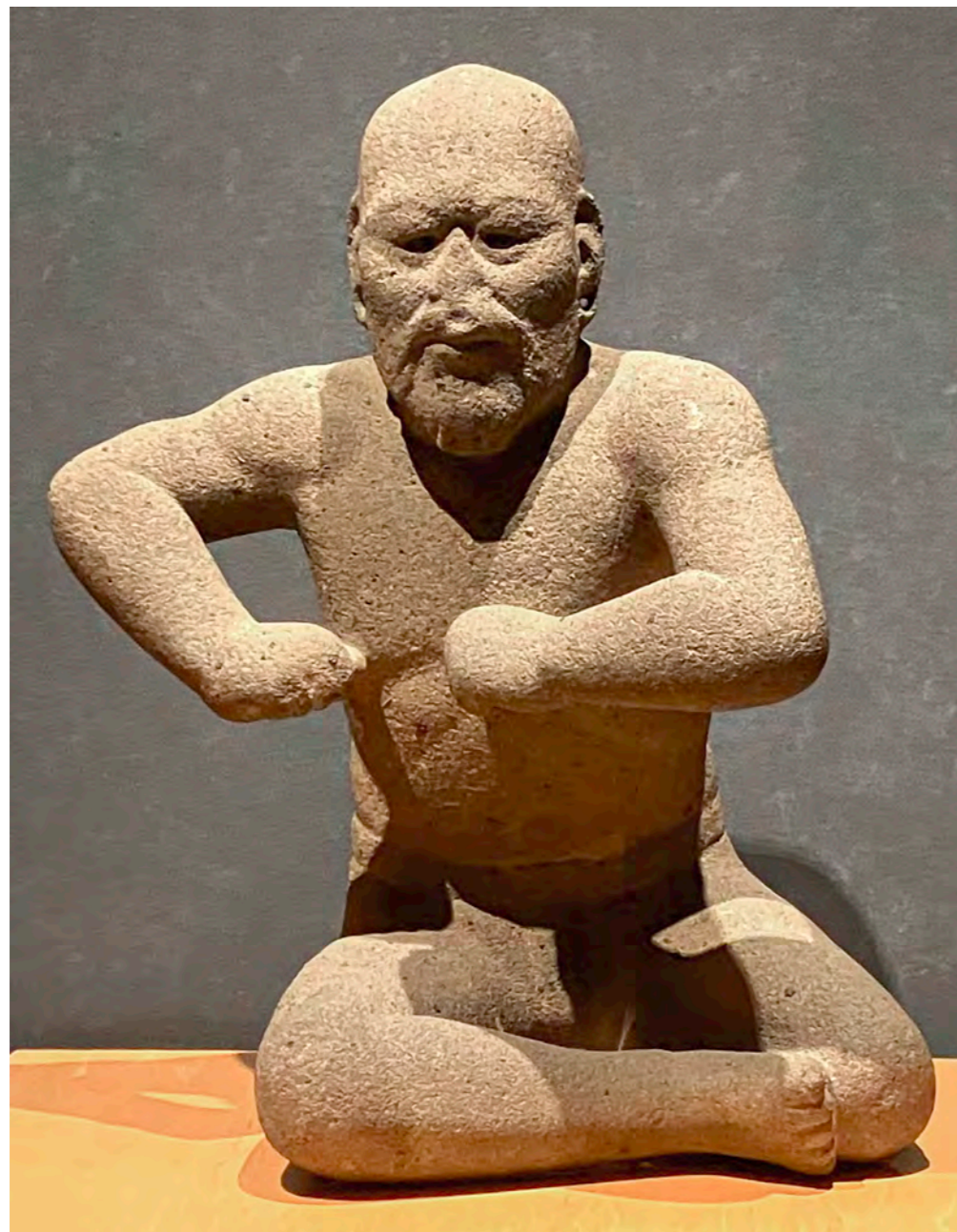
Monday I drove to Coyotepec to look at their black pottery but was disappointed to find in every stand nothing interesting but the same standard run of the mill designs. I bought some small bowls I had liked the previous year. Driving around the village I found the place where I had bought a beautiful small vase ten years ago, which had reminded me of ancient designs, but no more.

Entering Oaxaca, in a traffic jam, looking at my phone, I was unaware the car was slightly rolling forward till it touched the car in front. In the commotion following this the driver pointed at two symmetrical scratches left and right of his number plate as prove of damage. I pointed at the curvature of my car's bumper as prove the scratches could not have been caused by me, but he mentioned police and what not, when I touched his arm and asked how much. He seemed to leave that up to me and I offered 200 pesos. In response he asked for 300, so 250 pesos, 13 Dollar, made the deal and we parted satisfied to have saved time and agony.

Tuesday the Tamayo museum was closed, but not the museum of cultures. The building itself, the former convent of Santo Domingo, is impressive and is witness to the power and wealth of the early catholic church in Mexico. The archaeological exhibition together with the collection of the Tamayo museum require more than a single visit to be appreciated.

I left the next day and spent the night in Oaxtepec, past Cuautla, on the way back to Toluca, where I checked in again at the One Hotel for two nights. Calling Uber I spent another day in Mexico City to visit galleries. But after the first disappointing visit I decide to scrap further attempts and instead have Uber take me to the Museum of Anthropology, which I had last visited 1989. It is quite overwhelming for a single visit, and so I concentrated on sculpture, focusing on the Olmeca. Satisfied, I had Uber take me back to Toluca and the following day drove to Guadalajara, found the SR hotel but no restaurant except a fast food outfit next door.

Olmec wrestler



I had made an appointment for Sunday at 11 in the morning to visit Art 21 studio in Zapopan. After meeting Edward and his wife Liana, I was shown the foundry, discussed my objective and left with the promise of an estimate the next day. I was impressed by the work shown to me and the good understanding between us. Uber took me back to the SR and following Liana's advice, I drove Monday to Lake Chapala to visit Ajijic. My intention was to drive around the lake but gave up in Jocotepec and tried in the other direction. I chose a road close to the lake, looking down on untouched beaches so it seemed, ending up in villages where no road seemed possibly to continue. But friendly natives proofed otherwise and I continued all the way to Ocotlan. My plan to spend the night in La Barca fell through when the lady revealed that there was no parking, even so the advertisement for the place said otherwise. Returning to Guadalajara I got totally lost. Driving endlessly around in search of a hotel, the SR I could not find, it got dark and then in front of me two hotels in one compound advertised their comforts. I chose the Intercity and was not disappointed.

Refreshed and rested, after checking e-mails, finding Edward's estimate quite high if not equal to those in the US, I took off in the morning for Tequila. The drive was short and after checking in at the Hotel La Rienda Mision Tequillan I went to explore the town. After the Oaxaca debacle I made it now a point to establish clear visual references for the location of my hotel before leaving. From the plaza I followed the only interesting looking street and found myself in front of the Centro Cultural. The surprise were the displays in the passage ways around the central courtyard of Alexander von Wuthenau's Unexpected Faces in Ancient America. With great pleasure did I inspect the vitrines and was pleased to see that his life's passion had found a place to be seen. In front of a restaurant at the corner to the plaza seemed a good place to spend the rest of the day under an umbrella eating a good meal, watching people and enjoying some cool Victorias. The invitation from a beautiful young blond to tour a distillery across, obligatory for all tourists it seemed, I postponed for the next day, but then decided to skip it. A gorgeous breakfast in the morning in most elegant surroundings somewhat opposite my previous hangout at the plaza prepared me for the day. I set out to explore the town in circles, but exhausted and tired I had little interest and after a long nap in my hotel I decided to spend the early evening again in front of my preferred restaurant, where I was recognized and greeted to another wonderful meal.

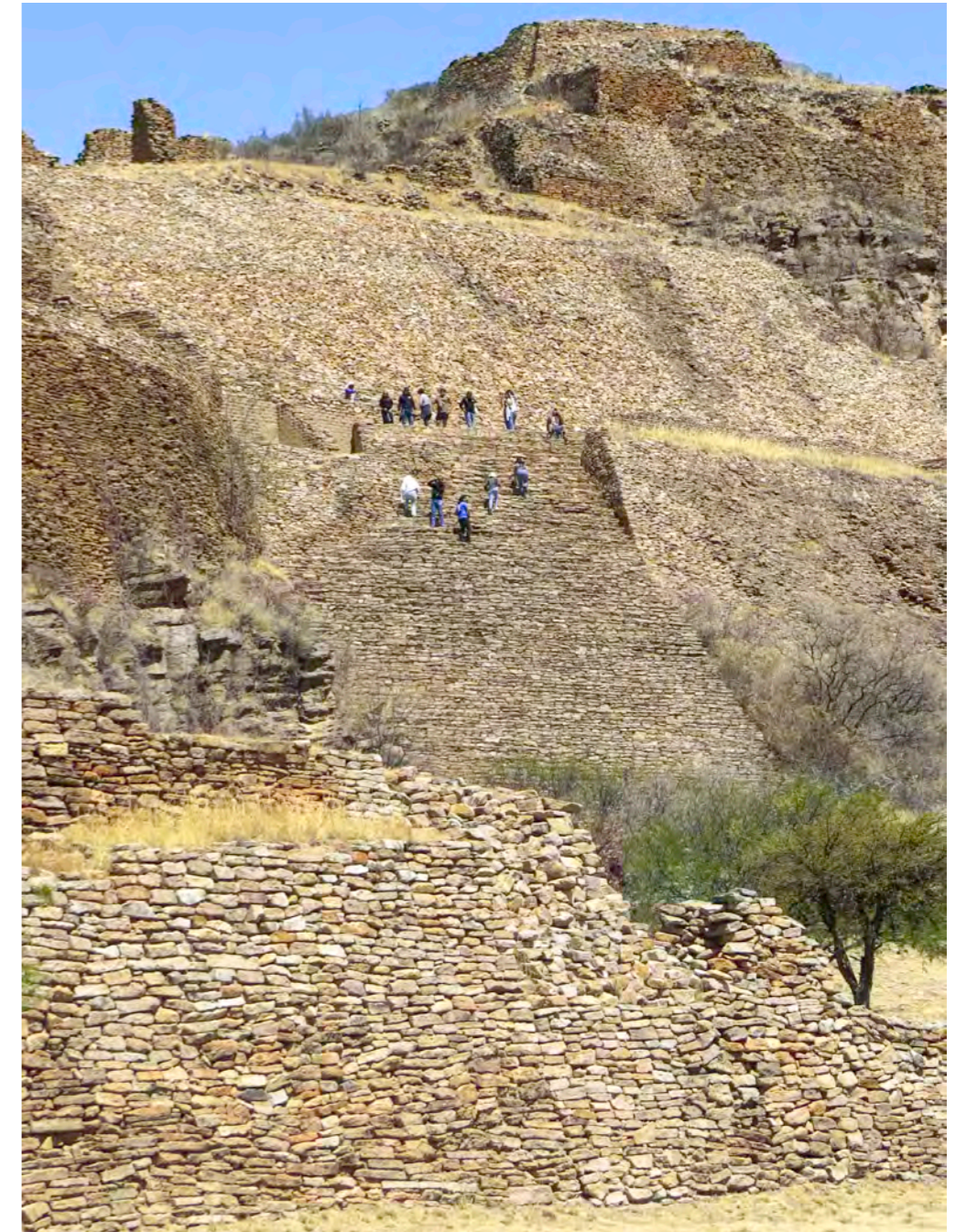
La Quemada



My next destination was Jerez and the ruins at La Quemada, otherwise known as Chicomoztoc. After a few wrong turns again in Guadalajara, I found my way and by 3pm reached Jemez, my hotel Leon prominently visible from some distance. I booked again for two nights, got directions to a nearby restaurant, enjoyed some fettuccine alfredo with shrimp, no beans, and went to bed early.

Quemada I had visited in 1975 when there was not much to see except it's location in the landscape and it's approximate dimension. There had been no visiting center nor any sign of life till I saw from the height of the main structure a donkey and an old man on top arrive. In due time, after walking the whole length of the fortification, we met, my red VW camper prominently parked and donkey and rider resting next to it in it's shade. I paid a few pesos belated entrance fee and continued on my trip south.

La Quemada



La Quemada

This time the place has a visiting center, a museum, rest rooms. Eighty pesos entrance fee. The ruins are massive. I only climbed half way up. What is now to be seen suggest a complicated, multilayered structure, steep flights of stairs, some curved supporting walls. The whole place following the profile of the landscape. Back at the hotel I realized something having gone wrong with my camera. I decided to make another trip to the ruins the next day and replace the faulty pictures. Eighty pesos in small coins, accumulated change from toll roads I had arranged as entrance fee, but Sundays entrance being free, I was left with finding other ways of getting rid of them. One more walk through the museum, being the first visitor of the day, videos were turned on, and I felt privileged. Being satisfied to have all the documentation missed the day before, I left for Guadalupe and Tom's residence in Bernardez.



He had been worried since he did not reach me at the hotel in Jemez as had been prearranged but forgotten by me. With a bottle of excellent Zacatecas red wine we celebrated my survival and safe return.

I left April 16 and arrived in Jimenez in the afternoon and crossed the border the day after in Ojinaga - Presidio. At a gas station convenient store I asked the sales girl for direction to El Paso and got a blank stare. A young man pushing a fancy bicycle a couple of blocks on took a breath to answer, then stopped and said I don't know. Finally, at a car wash, a black guy interrupted drying his car, pointed in one direction and said straight on till the throughway, then left. And so it was.

In 1986 and again in 1990 I could have stayed in Mexico. Some contacts promised to make a live there possible. Not so now. My present living conditions are quite comfortable and safe, at least for now, so, Santa Fe will have to do.