

# The Cosmovitral: Man and his Relationship with the Universe

At the beginning of the 20th century, during the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, a unique market space was designed in the city of Toluca. The metal structural base was fundamental to creating this project. Because of the beauty and exquisite design, and the quality of the workmanship, visitors thought that the piece had been made in France or Belgium. However, the piece was made in Mexico. Another building similar to this one is where today the El Chopo Natural History Museum in Mexico City is located.

By 1972, the market was no longer a functioning space, as it was too small for the needs of a city that had grown quickly; furthermore, the physical space started to constantly look dirty and aged, and it was ultimately abandoned. The authorities determined that it was no longer a good idea to keep the market in this location and suggested that the area be better used as a supermarket or as a shopping center.

However, Governor Jorge Jiménez Cantú decided to keep the structure and in 1980 one of the most outstanding cultural projects in the country was conceived: the Cosmovitral project. The purpose, besides taking advantage of the great metallic structure, was to create a microclimate for a glorious botanical garden. The physical layout of the site allowed it to have an unusual amount of light, and heat and air flow would permit a wide variety of species to thrive. Today the botanical garden is comprised of 400 species from the most far-flung corners of the earth, in addition to species that are endemic to the state of Mexico.

The botanical garden pays a well-deserved tribute to Eizi Matuda, a Japanese biologist who arrived in the state of Mexico in 1922 and dedicated himself to studying the herborology of the region; he identified and classified more than 6,000 native species. The garden's design was executed by another Japanese national, Nobuyuki Atsuma Matsuoka, who had fallen in love with Mexico and who passionately strove to capture the beauty of the country through this garden, which he hoped would be unique—and it was! It is one of the most ambitious projects in the city of Toluca, integrating a broader cultural purpose with its botanical roots.



Cosmovital, Toluca

The artist who proposed overhauling—and giving a new face to—the old 16 de Septiembre Market was Leopoldo Flores. He had visited the site and thought that the metal structure could be used to turn the old, sad, quadrangular stained glass windows into authentic monumental stained glass windows. These immense windows provided the cornerstone of an extraordinary transformation, thanks to Flores' vision.

For the design of the stained glass windows, the ever-masterful Flores took full advantage of the orientation of the building. Since it had a solar orientation, its main doors faced the east-west spectrum of the solar path. Thus, the stained glass narrative on the darker side highlights the "cold" colors to the north and the luminous side, with the "warm" colors on the south side. At the time of the spring equinox, March 21, the viewer can admire how the sun's rays at sunset penetrate the stained glass window with a unique vitality. For this reason, Flores decided to place the presence of the Man of Fire—or Prometheus—as the central figure of the work.



Man of Fire (Prometeo) Cosmovital, Toluca. Leopoldo Flores

Flores first traveled to Venice to visit the legendary Murano glass factories, in order to secure the necessary material to complete the work. He actually made a "grand tour" through Europe, visiting glass workshops in France, Belgium, and Germany, in order to buy the just-right materials, placing orders for nearly 30 different colored types of glass.

The process to articulate the mural, to bring it to life, was arduous. It required a team of over 40 skilled artisans responsible for masterfully crafting the leaded sections, while more than 30 men transported each piece to its place. The whole process took ten years. The Cosmovital is a feat. Undertaking a work of these dimensions was a major commitment, requiring an intense strength and spirit and a willingness to commit to such a disciplined endeavor. Flores' resolute perseverance to commit to this enormous project also speaks to his dedication and belief in its ultimate beauty and significance.

It is called "Cosmovital" because in it, Flores addresses the cosmos, man, and his relationship with the universe. The stained glass window occupies a surface of 3,000 m and is composed of

71 windows. Central to the work is a single window, as the entire narrative has a sequence that can be read through the images as they surround this central panel.

In order to appreciate what Flores captured in the Cosmovitral, we must unravel his motives and intentions. His main goal was to understand the myths of the universe; he attempted to capture forms, gestures, and attitudes of men within a scenario that was conceived as various theaters of a drama in which different elements of nature are opposed.

Flores' expressiveness enables us to delve deeper into the metaphor of good and evil, where the Cosmovitral offers a vision or a depiction of this duality. The initial reference is the Man of Fire, which introduces the viewer to the human figure and its proportions. The meaning of the Cosmovitral is encouraging and evocative at the same time. Flores commented: "When I take my paintbrush to work, I feel power, joy and fear. Although once I give the first brushstroke, that is over and creation begins."

A very special aspect of the Cosmovitral is the sequence of its depictions: it is not a collection of images, each with its own theme, but, rather, it shows a chromatic and figurative sequence, in which all its elements are linked, without requiring a formal beginning or ending. It is a single design that envelops the building, a synthesis of many dualities. There is a constant dialogue between day and night, life and death. It is, therefore, the solution of the mysteries of the life cycles that give essence and flight to the invincible bird... which is the universe.

Among the birds that represent the night, we find the owl. Flores noted that in the dichotomies of day and night and good and evil, the men of darkness are linked to night birds, while the birds of prey try to capture the men of light. It is a continuous struggle and one does not know who will emerge as the victor. An eloquent analogy of the endless cycle of life.





The Owl, Bird of the Night. Cosmovitral, Leopoldo Flores

A visit to the Cosmovitral will be inspiring. I urge you to view it and allow yourself to be gobsmacked by the audacity that Flores exhibited in creating such astonishing, mesmerizing art work.



Cosmovitral, Toluca



Live this experience on your trip to México City. [Book now.](#)

Between Murals and Stained Glass Windows  
by Dr. Marina Aguirre



Available now at [BucketlistMexico.com](http://BucketlistMexico.com)

Click on the eBook  
to see the Table of Contents