



# Foundational Arts: Mural Painting and Missionary Theater in New Spain

*Michael Karl Schuessler*

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The languages of two hemispheres collided when Spain conquered Mexico, and as a result, a dynamic expression of visual and dramatic arts emerged. Mural painting and missionary theater quickly became the media to explain and comprehend the encounter of indigenous peoples with Christ and the crucifixion, as well as with heaven and hell.

In *Foundational Arts* Michael K. Schuessler asserts that the literature of New Spain begins with missionary theater and its intimate relationship to mural painting. In particular, he examines the relationships between texts and visual images that emerged in Mexico at two Augustinian monasteries in Hidalgo, Mexico, during the century following the Spanish Conquest. The forced combination of the ideographical tradition of Nahuatl with Latin-based language alphabets led to a fascinating array of new cultural expressions.

Missionary theater was organized by ingenious friars with the intent to convert and catechize indigenous populations. Often performed in Nahuatl or other local languages, the actors combined Latin-based language texts with visual contexts that corresponded to indigenous ways of knowing: murals, architectural ornamentation, statuary, altars, and other modes of visual representation. By concentrating on the interrelationship between mural painting and missionary theater, *Foundational Arts* explores the artistic and ideological origins of Mexican plastic arts and literature.

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