

The top Mexican curator who became a professor at Tec de Monterrey



Ana Elena Mallet, first distinguished professor at [Tec de Monterrey's School of Architecture, Art, and Design \(EAAD\)](#), is an experienced **independent curator** for museums and cultural spaces in **Mexico** and around the **world**.

She sits on the **acquisitions committee** of the [Museum of Modern Art \(MoMA\)](#) in New York, the **first Latin American woman** on that board.

She has also collaborated with museums such as **Franz Mayer, Soumaya**, the **Art Institute of Chicago**, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, and others.

*"The **two most important disciplines** for me are **art** and **design**. **Art** is the discipline that brings the problems of contemporary life to the table, and **design** is the one that **provides solutions** to them," she explains.*

Mallet remembers that the **insistence by two professors** for her to **teach at the Tec** led her to ask to **give only one class as a condition** since she thought she would be rejected.

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The expected no turned into a yes

Ana's condition to teach at the Mexico City campus was to teach only the subject of **History of Design in Mexico** since she thought they would reject her proposal.

*"I thought, 'They're going to tell me no,' because there's no university in Mexico that teaches **History of Design in Mexico**. That doesn't exist... but they told me, 'Go ahead, we've arranged it',"* the professor recalls.

Her arrival at the Tec was at the **insistence** of the professors **Moisés Hernández**, director of studies, and **Ramiro Estrada**, says Mallet.

*"I'd taught **classes** before and stopped giving them to do a master's degree. **I didn't want to go back** to that, but Ramiro and Moisés were insistent,"* says Mallet.

After **three years** of that insistence by both professors, Mallet now gives a class in **History and Theory of Fashion in Mexico and the World, focusing on Art, objects, and fashion**.

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The first Latin American on MoMA's board

Mallet describes what it means to work for a museum like **MoMA** in New York.

*"It (MoMA) is the **museum** that has set the **tone** for **many things**, such as design history, with the way they put together collections and put on exhibits. It's been a **learning experience** to see it from **the inside**."*

From **2010** to **2012**, she directed the **Destination: Mexico** project, in which she brought together the work of **60 Mexican designers**, which was distributed to **MoMA shops** in **New York** and **Tokyo**.

*"Most of the **invitations** from **abroad** are from people who **know my work**. It's **satisfying** when someone from outside knows your work at the local level,"* she says.

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Becoming a “hologram professor”

Mallet was EAAD’s first [hologram professor](#), teaching **multiple campuses** simultaneously through a life-size **holographic projection** that can interact with students in real time.

*“I’m from the **generation** that saw the **Star Wars movies** and then you see that that utopia can become a **reality** and that you can be like **Princess Leia** and be seen from Mexico City in **real time** in León or Torreón.*

*“That’s like saying ‘**the future is here,**’ and it’s very **exciting** to be in an **institution** that’s committed to this type of **technology.**”*

At the same time, Mallet has promoted the work of her students with a project in which she invited them to work on creating **mini fashion documentaries** with **iPhones**.



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The museum that changed her life

When she was a child, Mallet dreamed of writing **works of fiction**, so she studied **Latin American Literature** at the Ibero-American University, but she found her calling by accident while doing her community service at the **Tamayo Museum**.

*"I **loved** the **work** they did at the museum. I found it **fascinating** to understand the 'guts' of the museum and tell these stories. I decided **I wanted to do that**," Mallet says.*

*"I didn't want to **proofread texts** or **edit a magazine**. After doing my community service at the (Tamayo) museum, I started working at a **contemporary art gallery** and then at the **Soumaya Museum**, and from there I stayed in museum spaces," recalls Mallet.*

From then on, she began to **collaborate** with **different museums**, some of which she already knew, such as the **Soumaya Museum**, but also at others, such as the **Museum of Contemporary Art (MARCO)** in Monterrey.

From **1996** until **1999**, Ana worked as a curator at the **Soumaya Museum**; from **1999 to 2001**, at the **Carrillo Gil Art Museum**; and the following year, at the **Rufino Tamayo Museum**, decided to go **independent**.

Showing her father her talent through an exhibit

After that experience at the **Tamayo Museum**, Ana decided that her passion was for **design**.

However, she met **resistance** from her **father**, a doctor of French descent, who asked her not to choose **design** over, what he called, "a productive career."

*“He said I was going to starve. He thought I would take on the **role of a married woman.**”*

Mallet focused on creating the **first exhibit in Mexico** dedicated to **contemporary fashion**, at the **Carrillo Gil Art Museum**, an exhibit at which **Ana’s father congratulated her** on her **work**.

*“When I did the first **fashion exhibit in Mexico**, (**my dad**) realized the reach I had and told me that he’d changed his own idea. I didn’t feel like I had **anything to prove to him** anymore,” Ana says while smiling during the interview.*

It was in that same exhibit, held from **December 2000** to **March 2001**, that she brought together **audiences** that weren’t so close, she says.

*“Fashion and design have the potential to **bring together modern audiences**. They’re relatable to people. In different countries, we get dressed and sit in chairs and drink out of cups every day.*

*“We identify with each other not because we all have paintings or sculptures, but because we do have chairs or blouses. The **everyday life** that **design** and **fashion** give us is part of **Mexico’s cultural history**,” says Mallet.*

“The everyday life that design and fashion give us is part of Mexico’s cultural history.”

https://www.instagram.com/p/CIZIHxXpo_0/ **The challenges of being an independent curator**

In choosing to be an **independent curator** Ana had different **challenges** and **responsibilities** than when she worked only for a specific museum.

*“There is no **curatorial career in Mexico**. I learned from these amazing characters who were above me. I loved working in a museum, and when I decided to become independent, it was what I missed the most,” she says.*

Mallet points out that today most of the **museums** she **works** with are those that are **ask** her to **collaborate**. However, she points out that **this wasn’t always the case**.

*“As an independent agent, it’s about approaching them like a **seller of encyclopedias** or **dreams**. You go with your portfolio and say, ‘I have this idea, and I’d like to do it in this space,’” says Mallet.*

“Most of the invitations from abroad are from people who know my work. It’s satisfying when someone from outside knows your work at the local level.”

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CNYObHXJzqZ/>

The challenge of promoting something that doesn’t exist in Mexico

Ana looks up when asked about the **biggest challenge** of promoting **art** and **design** in **Mexico** and pauses for a few seconds before answering.

*“(The most challenging thing) is **living** in a **country** that **has no memory**, a place where few **archives** and materials from the past are **stored** and **preserved**.”*

*“It’s a **huge challenge** to tell a story when there’s **very little material**. You have to dedicate your **time, money, and effort** to it because there aren’t many institutions that want to collaborate, pay, and promote research,”* says Ana.

Mallet adds that the challenge from the point of view of being a **design historian** is that **institutions** didn’t believe it was very **important** to exhibit **design** in **art spaces** and make room for designers to communicate their vision.

The belief that art and design are only for people of the **upper class** or those who don’t need to work and spend their time in art galleries are some of the **prejudices** that Ana says existed several years ago.

Mallet believed in something different, that **art** and **design** are **present** in **everyday life**, and she would work to convince the leaders of **cultural spaces** and others that both disciplines are more relatable than they thought.

*“**Art is the discipline that brings the problems of contemporary life to the table, and design is the one that provides solutions to them.**”*

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She hasn’t left behind books entirely

Mallet didn’t abandon **literature** entirely, but instead of writing **fiction** as she dreamed of doing as a child, she decided to share the **design** and **real stories** of people with a similar passion through her **books**.

For example, in **2017** she published ***Silla mexicana*** (Mexican Chair), in which she conducts an investigation of **chairs as objects**, which was an **exhibit** that later became a **book**.

Similarly, in **2014**, she published ***Bauhaus and Modern Mexico: Design by Van Beuren***, which is about the life of this artist and his furniture factory.

In **2006**, together with **Óscar Salinas** and **Alejandro Hernández**, she published ***El diseño de Clara Porset*** (Clara Porset’s Design), which narrates the life and work of Porset, a thinker and design theorist in Mexico.

She also recently published ***Felix Tissot, Lo eterno y lo moderno*** (Felix Tissot: Eternal and Modern), which is about the life of the French ceramist who arrived in Taxco in 1956 and promoted the ceramic industry in collaboration with indigenous communities.

