

OBITUARY

## Obituary of Fernando Ortiz Monasterio y de Garay, Sr. 1923 to 2012

Jose Abel de la Peña-Salcedo

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Mexico's father of plastic surgery, Fernando Ortiz Monasterio, recently passed away. For all the people who had the privilege to work with him, he was known as "the Master." He was a Mexican plastic surgery ambassador younger than Mario Gonzalez Ulloa, his contemporary.

Fernando Ortiz Monasterio devoted his life to teach and raise a scientific mind in each of his residents and plastic surgeons from all over the world who came to Mexico city to see him perform craniofacial, aesthetic, and reconstructive procedures almost simultaneously. He developed an interesting capacity to work 20 h a day while never forgetting to include sports and joy as part of his life.

As a scientist by conviction, sportsman since his youth, sybaritic for life, historian, librarian, archaeologist, anthropologist of the Mexican upland, self-described artisan artistically applying the knowledge of plastic surgery to accomplish transformation, art collector, humanitarian, and a great lover of intelligence, Ortiz Monasterio described intelligence as a capacity of synthesis and analysis.

With a privileged scientific mind, on 6 July 1946, Ortiz Monasterio finished medical school at the prestigious Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico, a school he never left in his lifetime. With a selected group of Mexican doctors, he formed a board to support this magnificent building in the historic area of Mexico's downtown.

From 1946 to 1951, Ortiz Monasterio was trained in general surgery and had his first contact with plastic surgery working with a young surgeon, Alfonso Serrano, who had come back from his training in the United States to



repair burn contractures and give life back to people with terrible injuries.

Ortiz Monasterio thought this new area of surgery was fantastic. He said, "There are few ways to resect a gallbladder or to fix a hernia, but plastic surgery is limitless." Tireless, he worked to win a scholarship for admission to a 2-year program at Texas University in Galveston at Truman Blocker's service. With his attitude, he was promoted to continue with his plastic surgery training in Dallas, Chicago, New York, and Saint Louis. In 1954, he had an offer to stay in United States, but he was ready to come back and practice in Mexico.

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J. A. de la Peña-Salcedo (✉)  
Institute of Plastic Surgery S.C, Vialidad de la Barranca S/N Mz  
II Lote I Consultorio 490 Col. Valle de las Palmas,  
52763 Huixquilucan, Estado de Mexico, Mexico  
e-mail: drabeldelapena@hotmail.com

He started as a plastic surgeon at the General Hospital in Mexico, a university hospital with more than 1,000 beds and part of the Ministry of Health. He enthusiastically made rounds all over the hospital on a bicycle, on which he had instruments and dressing material to cover open wounds, grafts, and flaps, interacting with other surgeons and doctors, showing them what plastic surgery was.

Ortiz Monasterio started the Plastic Surgery Department at the General Hospital and in 1957 established the first university program in plastic surgery. After a formal training in general surgery, the Plastic Surgery Department offered a 3-year postgraduate program with only one condition: full-time devotion, reflected in the motto, “you may sleep or eat if it is possible.” At the same time, he started his private practice close to the General Hospital.

He encouraged all his residents to use his private library, one of the most complete plastic surgery libraries. His wife, Leonor, at this time with 8 children (2 girls and 6 boys), always had a smile on her face as well as food and fresh water in their house.

In 1959, Ortiz Monasterio started the first multidisciplinary clinic for cleft lip and palate with orthodontics and a speech therapist. In this field, he developed several techniques for nasal correction and published articles demonstrating that maxillary growth may be impaired by surgical procedures.

After 20 years of successful correction for the nasal deformity with his open technique, Ortiz Monasterio came back from Australia and gathered us to show us the work of Sir Harold McComb. That morning was the end of open nasal correction for cleft lip. In 1968, he established a mobile unit for cleft lip and palate correction, the first step that preceded the extra bounds programs all over the country.

Years later, in 1984, Ortiz Monasterio began a protocol for intrauterine correction of cleft lip. We operated on several monkeys until one of his patients came to his private practice pregnant with a cleft lip fetus in her entrails. The team was ready, and the procedure was performed with some difficulties. Although it ended well, it still was too risky to set a standard for surgery. Although Fernando was the first surgeon in the world to perform this procedure, he desisted because of an ethical dilemma expressed in the maxim “the risk does not justify the procedure.”

In 1967, in Le Baule, France, Ortiz Monasterio met Dr. Paul Tessier but not in a surgical setting. Ortiz Monasterio was a sailing competitor representing Mexico, surrounded by sea, sports, and competition.

This was the time when craniofacial surgery and a lifetime friendship began. Ortiz Monasterio adopted the concept for craniofacial surgery, then modified, innovated, and performed new procedures for craniofacial clefts, obtaining Tessie’s recognition. In a wide spectrum of

craniofacial deformities, soft tissue and bone, congenital and traumatic, including tumor resection, he mastered the complex aesthetic and functional problems associated with each and individualized interventions based on fundamental concepts.

Despite several professional achievements, Ortiz Monasterio had more in the personal area, being a leader. He included every resident he had and enjoyed personal debate with intelligent arguments. He loved people with natural humor, and his creativity broke the bounds of scientific presentations. His lectures were acclaimed including these two: Prehispanic World Seen Through The Eyes of a Plastic Surgeon and A Dream in Bologna in 1500. In relation to the second lecture, he was convinced he had seen, spoken to, and interacted with Gaspare Tagliacotzi in the small streets surrounding the University of Bologna.

Ortiz Monasterio published a lot of papers, gave lectures, and taught instructional courses all over the world. In his professional achievements, he was nominated, evaluated, and accepted as emeritus professor at the National School of Medicine. Later, in 2010, he received the Doctor Honoris Causa award from Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). His 60 years of high-quality productive scientific life was finally recognized, and on that occasion, Fernando Ortiz Monasterio said, “Don’t believe in nothing; the dogmas should be unacceptable for you; if I said it, or the textbooks or the journals, you don’t accept it, question it. It is unacceptable that medical doctors don’t think as scientists and stop questioning, researching, observing, and getting conclusions in their clinical work.”

Don Quijote De La Mancha said simply in Miguel de Cervantes’ famous book, “give credit to his facts not to his words.” Probably no resemblance is as good as this one between Ortiz Monasterio and the famous Don Quijote de la Mancha.

At the same time, the activities of Ortiz Monasterio allowed him to evolve as founder of the Mexican Council of Plastic Aesthetic and Reconstructive Surgery (CMC-PER) in 1967 and later as its president from 1974 to 1976. Subsequently, he was president of the Mexican Association of Plastic, Aesthetic, and Reconstructive Surgery (AMC-PER) from 1969 to 1971. As director of the Educational Foundation of Ibero-latinoamerican Federation of Plastic Surgery (FILACP), he created the National Contest of Plastic Surgery Residents in 1971, an idea that later was transferred to the FILACP as the International Residents Contest that began in Quito, Ecuador.

His degrees as an academic doctor in the Mexican Academy of Surgery in 1962 and in the National Academy of Medicine in 1963 as well as his position as President of these institutions in 1974 helped him to publish his first textbook about hand surgery. He was a distinguished member of the Board of Restoration of the Palace of his

former medical school. Today, it is possible to visit the emeritus professors hall and the “Ortiz Monasterio Craniofacial Surgery Museum.”

Between 1976 and 1980, Ortiz Monasterio was president of the International Cleft Palate and Related Craniofacial Anomalies Committee and presided over the IV International Meeting in Acapulco (1980), where he opened the event by welcoming attendees in 12 different languages.

In 1988, he was the president of The American Association of Plastic Surgeons (AAPS), an elitist association with the highest range of scientific and professional exclusivity. He commented to Leonor, his wife: “I appreciate the honors, but my pleasure is achieving things advancing in life.” Ortiz Monasterio was the second non-American president and the only Latin American to hold this distinction. During this time, he gave his special touch of Latin elegance to all events, especially in the Phoenix, Arizona meeting.

In 1951, Ortiz Monasterio published his first scientific paper. Certainly, he already had imagined the potential that led him to publish more than 215 articles and 8 textbooks of surgery that actually rate as “classics.” As a testimony to his human and professional capacities, he received awards and recognitions in Mexico, Spain, Bolivia, Peru, France, Germany, Australia, United States, England,

Argentina, and Uruguay, as well as Doctor Honoris Causa awards in several Latin American and European universities. Always an outstanding communicator, he was selected as the keynote speaker on many occasions around the world.

In 1996, in a ceremony organized in his honor in New York, Ortiz Monasterio said in his speech, with a clear and firm voice, “Do well my job is gratifying. When the constant is searching for better or different solutions built into your armamentarium, when you are involved in an impossible dream in the pursuit of excellence, when the passion’s flame lights up your daily work, then the work becomes fascinating, exciting, and becomes the most wonderful intellectual adventure in which anyone can get involved.”

Thus, he was a doctor, father of hundreds of plastic surgeons, and philosopher, who appeared like a comet, with its small nucleus irradiating a luminous tail that extends into space, enlightening all around him. That was Fernando Ortiz Monasterio, a unique person among persons who like comets appear from time to time but illuminate everything. His flame will not be extinguished while his light follows us.

**Conflict of interest** The author declares that he has no conflict of interest to disclose