

Chapter 1

Comparison of Characteristics of the Vernacular Architecture of Northern Mexico

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Introduction

This study compares vernacular architecture in northern México, focusing on the states of Nuevo Leon and Chihuahua. The research seeks to identify similarities and differences in both region's construction solutions, materials used, and climate adaptation strategies. The methodology applies the analysis of four representative case studies selected for their architectural value and relevance in preserving traditional techniques.

The work prioritizes the qualitative approach, combining fieldwork, historical documentation, and morphological analysis of the buildings. The evaluation criteria include the use of local materials, the response to the arid and extreme climate, and the evolution of living spaces based on the sociocultural needs of each region. The results will allow an understanding of how vernacular architecture has responded to northern México's geographical and environmental conditions, providing key information for its conservation and reinterpretation in the contemporary context. The study seeks to show regional architectural heritage and the generation of sustainable strategies in current architecture.

The vernacular architecture of northeastern México is characterized by a style heavily influenced by the colonial architecture inherited from Spanish colonization. These types of vernacular buildings have been transformed from residential to mixed-use, commercial, or even government buildings or museums. This research aims to study the most representative characteristics of iconic buildings in northeastern México to describe the representative elements that could be integrated into a possible planning process for the changing vertical housing landscape fostered by the densification of spaces in the residential area of Monterrey. Today, in the entire world, Mexican vernacular architecture is most closely associated with the architectural designs of Luis Barragán, Ricardo Legorreta, and Mauricio Rocha. These contemporary architects have based their design proposals on the vernacular elements of the architecture of the country's central region, where the use of color as a focal element, the use of central courtyards, the implementation of latticework, and the materiality of the site predominate. The three architects share a style characterized by the use of vibrant colors and lighting that combines modern and vernacular elements of the architecture of the country's south-central Mexican region.

This research seeks to study the most representative characteristics of iconic buildings in northeastern México to describe the representative elements that could be integrated into future planning. The team considered that the northeast of México comprises the states of Tamaulipas, Nuevo León, Coahuila, and Chihuahua. It is pertinent to mention that the colonization of México was primarily in the south-central area of the country, leaving the northeast in a late colonization, where desert climatic conditions predominate. An essential point in the typological analysis of vernacular housing in northeastern México is that contemporary changes in customs, lifestyles, and materials have directly impacted the size of living spaces, their location within the local context, and the optimization and standardization of material modulation.

The research was developed on the premise that Mexican vernacular architecture represents an essential component of the tangible and intangible heritage in the central region of the country but has been little explored in the north. The topic is of utmost importance, corresponding to bioclimatic topographical, historical, social, and material conditions. The team's motivation was lacking technical information and documentary historical material from graphic records. Comparative study seemed to be the way to go deeper into the topic. Surveys, photographic logs, and three-dimensional modeling were used to document and compare four buildings' spatial and constructive characteristics in Chihuahua and Nuevo León. The team chose them because their original purpose was residential, although most currently serve as museums. Another important criterion was the location of the buildings in the historic centers of each city. The research question was: What are the differences and similarities

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in the spatial distribution, materials, and elements of four representative case studies of vernacular architecture from Chihuahua and Nuevo León, based on their analysis using architectural surveys and three-dimensional modeling? The research team addressed another question: How can some of these elements be recovered in contemporary architecture to reclaim the identity of northern Mexican architecture in single-family and multi-family housing design courses? The study's main objective is to compare four representative buildings of vernacular architecture in Chihuahua and Nuevo León by analyzing materials, functional elements, and spatial organization through surveying and three-dimensional modeling.

Research Gap in the Vernacular Architecture of Northern Mexico

According to Tamez (1992), vernacular architecture is related to a community's traditions, customs, and family life. These buildings adopt a practical and simple design without a focus on aesthetics. Their objective is to satisfy the fundamental needs of residents and utilize the sources available in the surrounding environment. Using local materials allows each building to be unique, tailored to its location, and responsive to its surroundings. Climate and the availability of certain materials define the structure and character of vernacular architecture, along with the customs and methods of local builders. Communities from the country's center and the Iberian Peninsula settled in northern México. Local architecture shows influence from both groups, with modifications adapted to a harsh climate. The community simplified its architecture due to environmental restrictions, the lack of interaction with local indigenous cultures, and the availability of materials.

According to Castillo (2023), vernacular architecture reflects the way of life of a group, where their culture, tradition and knowledge generate schemes that are transmitted over time. This demonstrates the importance of implementing techniques that have been passed down from generation to generation over the years, highlighting the significance of the relationship between empirical construction techniques and their connection to the environment. Tostado (2018) mentioned the recovery of the values of ancestral architecture will serve in the future to propose and construct spaces that are efficient in terms of spatiality and constructability. One of the objectives of the study is to make it know, to foster a sense of identity in the new generation of architects being trained at the University of Monterrey. Caruso (2020) mentions that people appear to have a major propensity to take care of ancient architecture when they have feelings of belonging to it. That's exactly what the school of architecture wants to promote in the students and staff.

Objectives and Hypotheses and Relevance of the Study

This research aims to analyze four architectural buildings considered vernacular by the National Institute of Anthropology and History in northeastern México and compare their functional and constructive characteristics. The specific objectives of this research include describing the most representative architectural elements of the buildings located in the historic centers of Monterrey and Chihuahua. The aim is to identify the aspects of vernacular architecture that remain contemporary in the 21st century. A third purpose is to compile information to be used as a study and application tool for the single-family housing workshop, focusing on passive sustainable strategies.

Identifying vernacular elements from northeastern México will allow the recovery of passive sustainable strategies in the projects of the simple-family housing workshop, reinforce the transversal knowledge of the courses on Mexican architecture and northeastern heritage, and identify them within the implementation of proposals.

The specific objectives of the research are:

- Conduct detailed architectural surveys of the four buildings
- Construct three-dimensional models that represent their original and current conditions
- Identify the materials and construction techniques used in the different buildings
- Analyze the functional architectural layout by comparing the uses assigned to the spaces in each example
- Create a comparative matrix demonstrating similarities and differences according to the established parameters.

Despite sharing an adaptative vernacular logic, traditional architecture in Chihuahua and Nuevo León exhibits significant differences in its materials and architectural and functional elements. These differences correspond to each context's climatic, cultural, and material conditions. However, similar patterns persist in the spatial organization of spaces, spatial use, and habitability.

As King (2001) quotes, referring to the author Jaime Rantel, "vernacular architecture is that which is born from the functional and formal needs of a region, both from the use of its natural resources and to build it" what is true is that vernacular architecture has as one of the main characteristics that it adapts to the location and the existing microclimate of the context. The study's relevance is that this type of analysis fosters a critical approach to contemporary design, promotes the rational use of materials, and strengthens the ability to design living spaces adapted to their context rather than imposing foreign solutions. In this sense, vernacular architecture becomes a valuable source of applicable learning, both in formal and functional terms, contributing to developing a more conscious, resilient, and relevant architecture for local realities.

The knowledge acquired from this study will be applied in the multi-family housing workshop. Lang (2005) refers to this type of housing as a building typology designed with multiple housing units integrated within a single

building or complex. This type of housing is primarily found in a vertical format, in the form of low- medium or high-density buildings. In the last 50 years, they have become a solution to rapid urban growth and the need to optimize the densification of cities. In the Mexican context, three cities have experienced rapid growth: México City, Monterrey, and Guadalajara.

Background and Context

According to King (2001), in México, the study of vernacular architecture in the south-central part of the country predominates, leaving the architecture of the northeast and northwest of the country little documentation and scarce recovery intervention for new uses. This lack of information became one of the limitations in the study prepared because most of the information and articles related to vernacular architecture are associated with the catalog of the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH)

Monterrey was founded in 1596 by Diego de Montemayor. It was established as "Ciudad Metropolitana de Nuestra Señora de Monterrey." The original layout of Nuevo León consisted of the Church of San Francisco, houses with predominantly stone and adobe construction materials, wooden roofs, and tile. These houses were characterized by being single-story houses with a central courtyard. On the other hand, the historic center of Chihuahua was founded one hundred and thirteen years after Monterrey. The registered founding date is the year 1709, by Antonio Deza Ulloa with the name: "Real de Minas de San Francisco de Cuéllar." It was a city founded as a mining settlement. The San Francisco de Asís temple, dated 1715, was constructed among the first buildings, according to the INAH. The College of Mother of Loreto (1718) and the Cathedral of Chihuahua were built in 1725 and completed one hundred years later. According to Azevedo (2016), This architecture is recognized for its outstanding heritage value, reflecting the culture and traditions of a specific region. However, it remains associated with the past, with underdevelopment and poverty. The fact is that vernacular architecture has much more potential than old techniques. Suppose new architects understand which elements can be incorporated into the current context. In that case, the territory can be transformed, meeting the needs of its users and keeping it in harmony with its surroundings.

Jimenez (2014) mentioned that the value of vernacular buildings and texts lies in the fact that they are documentary information, open books that tell us about the past and present. They tell a story about the evolution of a community. Thus, population and their surroundings, regardless of latitude, become precise settings of cultural landscapes where we can perceive and contrast the relationships between human beings and between them and their natural environment. Fernández (2021) complements by arguing that vernacular architecture is important manifestation of culture that materializes the way of understanding the environment and relating to it. The reflection that motivated the work team to develop the study was precisely the curiosity and the need to compare the elements present in the chosen case studies, but above all, which elements can contribute to be implemented in contemporary architecture to make it more efficient. It is important to highlight that vernacular architecture becomes not only a mirror of civilization, leaving a record of what the construction techniques of a time were, but also of what life was like back then. Ortiz (2011) said that as a rule, vernacular architecture reveals the characteristics of the human group more clearly than grand residences, which tend to manifest themselves in languages foreign to their reality, using fashions imposed by international architects. It is important to value local technical constructions knowledge that adapts to the bioclimatic conditions of the region, specifically in the case of Mexico, to the warm desert climate that predominates in the north of the country.

Materials and Methods and the cases study

The qualitative and comparative research utilized graphic documentation and digital modeling techniques. The four phases of the process were executed. The first phase includes the architectural survey, which provides for measurements, sketching, a site visit, and photographic records. The second phase was three-dimensional modeling, which used the measurements and information collected to document the information gathered. The third phase consisted of classifying the photographs and performing a comparative analysis. This analysis included material, construction techniques, use of the space, and function. The fourth phase consisted of preparing a summary table containing the information gathered.

The study of vernacular architecture in northeastern México holds historical and cultural value. It has profound practical utility in learning and developing projects within the single- and multi-family housing workshop. Therefore, the team analyzed four case studies to understand how local communities, over centuries, ingeniously and sustainably resolved housing needs in extreme climate contexts. Knowing vernacular architecture allows future architects to build a solid foundation for designing with sensitivity and responsibility. Before designing, it is essential to understand architecture not as an isolated product but as a comprehensive response to the environment, available resources, and social dynamics.

The case studies were chosen based on two criteria: the first criterion was their location within the city's historic center, as the most representative buildings are in the city's main squares. The second criterion was that the buildings had to be initially used for residential purposes. It's worth noting that the fact that the buildings were located on a corner, in the middle of the block, or occupied an entire block had no impact on the study. Currently, most of the buildings are segmented due to population growth in recent years, and most of them no longer serve residential purposes. Both have been converted into institutional buildings. After reviewing the urban layout's general characteristics, the evaluation case studies were selected. An essential factor in the selection was the availability of existing information on plans and the permits to conduct on-site measurements. Four case studies were investigated to compare the results of this research, two in Chihuahua and two in Nuevo León.

Chihuahua:

- Casa de Juárez, located at Avenue. Juárez 321, corner with Calle 5a, Col. Zone Centre, C.P. 31000, Chihuahua, Chihuahua. See figure 1.

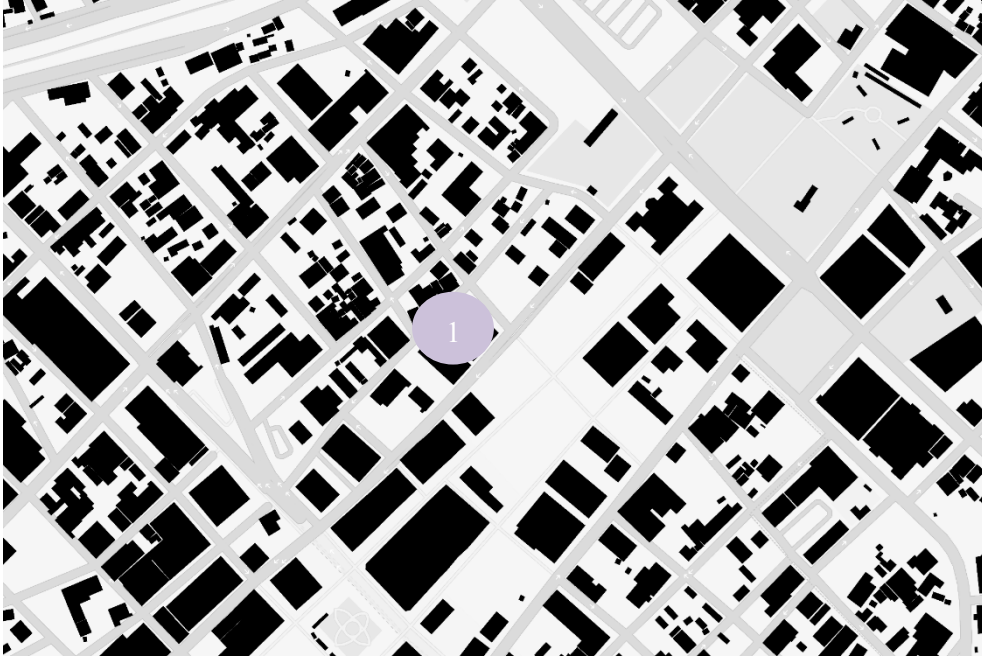


Figure 1. Localization of Cases Study. Casa Juárez in Chihuahua (Developed by Author)

- Museo Casa Camargo, located at Comonfort 104, Centre, CP 33700, Santa Rosalía de Camargo, Camargo, Chihuahua. See figure 2.



Figure 2. Localization of Cases Study. Casa Juárez in Chihuahua.

Nuevo León:

- 1. Museo Estatal de Culturas Populares, located at Mariano Abasolo 1024, Centre, Barrio Antiguo, CP 64000, Monterrey, Monterrey, Nuevo León
- 2. Hacienda Verona, located at Gral. Mariano Abasolo 871 y 881. Centre, Barrio Antiguo, CP 64000, Monterrey, Monterrey, Nuevo León. See figure 3.
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Figure 3. Localization of Cases Study in Monterrey.

Chihuahua: La Casa Juárez

Located at Av. Benito Juárez 321, Zona Centro, 31000 Chihuahua, Chihuahua.

Its primary function was housing and serve as the office of the President of the Republic, Mr. Benito Juárez, during the period of the French intervention, from October 12th, 1864, to August 5th, 1865, from November 20th to December 9th of the same year, and from June 7th to December 10th, 1866.

During those years, the building also served as the seat of state powers until 1892, when the Government Palace was constructed. It remained unoccupied until it was designated as an educational building, creating Primary School No. 140, which served from 1894 to 1967. At that time, the governor, General Praxedes Giner, granted it to the Chihuahuan Society of Historical Studies under civic trusteeship. In 1967, the government granted the Society of Historical Studies property to become their offices. In 1972, on the centennial of the death of Benito Juárez, authorities opened the space as a museum and named it the Casa de Juárez Museum, and it was inaugurated in 2000. It is an adobe building with a floor plan like the traditional plans of colonial houses. Its main entrance is in the center of the house and has direct access to the interior courtyard, from which the house's different rooms are distributed. The rectangular courtyard features a roofed perimeter walkway delimited by lintelled arches, whose round-shafted columns with Ionic-style capitals are made of quarry stone.

Looking at the 3D rendering of the Casa de Juárez, notable elements can be identified, such as the door and window frames and ironwork protection on the façade openings. Ionic arches and columns surround the building's interior courtyard. It also features brick details interspersed at the corners of the façades, providing an aesthetic touch.



Figure 4. Collage of Casa Juárez (Collage Developed by Author)

Chihuahua: Casa Camargo

According to Presidencia Camargo (2009), the building was initially constructed as a residence and is now a cultural museum. It is located at the intersection of Trías and Comonfort streets in Chihuahua and represents typical 19th-century regional architecture.

The house includes several interconnected rooms that create a continuous circuit, enabling a professional experience. This layout allows for the appropriate design of spaces dedicated to the exhibition of significant works and objects. The central area is adapted for various cultural events, and a storage room serves as a general archive. The building houses several distinct areas:

- Historical exhibition rooms with photographs and objects
- A hall dedicated to notable local figures, which displays portraits, personal belongings, and samples of their work
- An art exhibition room for photographic, pictorial, or sculptural works of local and guest artists
- A local craft store
- A multipurpose space for workshops, exhibitions, conferences, and more.



Figure 5. Casa Camargo (Developed by Author).

Nuevo León: La Casa del Campesino

According to Cavazos, I. (2019), the building currently known as the Museo Estatal de Culturas Populares de Nuevo León, located in the Barrio Antiguo of Monterrey, México, has undergone a functional evolution over time. Its history dates back to the 18th century. Initially, the property was used for residential purposes, later serving hospital, educational, and social welfare functions, and was eventually adapted for cultural, recreational, and leisure uses as a museum.

At the beginning of the 18th century, the land where the building now stands belonged to miner Santiago Barrera, who sold it to Nicolás de Vandale. Vandale later transferred it to General Alonso García Coello, who built a stone house on what was then San Francisco Street, next to the river. García Coello died in 1728, and his testamentary executor, Mateo de Lafita, sold the house in 1746 to Governor Pedro de Barrio, who lived in it during his term and left it as a pending payment legacy to the San Francisco convent.

Later, in 1766, the property was transferred to Governor Ignacio Ussel y Guimbarda, who resided in Monterrey between 1764 and 1772. It is believed that he was the one who constructed the house in its current form between 1764 and 1769. Inventories conducted after his death describe an impressive building with 25 rooms built of lime and stone, roofs made with over 800 wooden planks, fine carpentry elements of pine and mesquite, and a perimeter wall with multicolored clay battlements. The building also includes three interior courtyards.

At the end of the 18th century, Bishop Andrés Ambrosio de Llanos y Valdés established the Hospital Real de Nuestra Señora del Rosario in the building, which operated until shortly after 1850. Later, in 1856, Bishop Francisco de P. Vereá established a girls' school there, operated by the Sisters of Charity until their expulsion in 1874. The school was later reopened as Colegio San José and then renamed Colegio Mexicano during the religious conflict under the direction of teacher Mercedes Flores.

In the 1920s, a new chapel was built on the property, decorated by artists such as Crescenciano Garza Rivera, whose works represent a pioneering stage of muralism in the region. Later, during the Cardenista era, the building was handed over to peasant organizations and became known as the Casa del Campesino.

The images show how the façade follows a rhythmic pattern in the placement of its windows and subtractions. Using baseboards on the façade, with a stone finish, is also evident. The thickness of the walls, the use of arches, and the lime and sand plaster finishes on the interior and exterior of the building are also noticeable. See figure 6.



Figure 6. Casa del Campesino / (Collage Developed by Author).

Nuevo León: Hacienda Verona

Hacienda Verona is at the corner of General Mariano Abasolo and Diego de Montemayor streets. According to the Government of Nuevo León (2013), this building was built in the 20th century. Its Art Deco style characterizes it; however, elements of vernacular architecture from Nuevo León can be identified in its morphology and materiality. Its original use was residential. It was later converted into a meditation school and functions as an event hall. At

present, the building is in good condition in terms of its façades, walls, and roof. The façade is finished with a lime-sand plaster over walls made of stone blocks. The ornamentation on its south and east façades, which face the street, shows a neocolonial influence in the Tuscan pilasters and the undulating molding that runs along them. Located on a corner, its façades feature main and service entrances. We can notice that the building has its Deco ornamentation, with vernacular and neoclassical influences, in elements such as the columns and pilasters, as well as the rhythm in the façade. It features a central courtyard surrounded by arches. Stone walls and wood ceilings are notable in his interior.



Figure 7. Hacienda Verona (Collage Developed by Author).

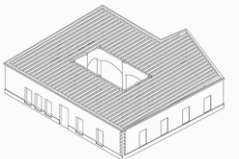
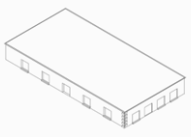
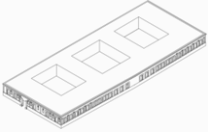
Results and Discussion

Despite their geographical differences, Monterrey, with its more humid climate and proximity to the Sierra Madre Oriental and Chihuahua in the heart of the northern desert, both cities developed architectural solutions that respond to extreme climatic conditions, such as the use of thermal materials (adobe, stone, lime) and natural ventilation systems. Likewise, the layout of the central courtyards, flat roofs, and thick walls are common elements that allow us to identify the regional architectural language. This presentation will compare these characteristics and the elements that can be preserved today.

Casa de Juárez is a clear example of how it's possible to maintain the essence of a building over the years. Its primary function was residential, but it is currently a museum, with its main elements intact, such as its central courtyard, arches, and the placement of its windows and doors. The main façade remains intact, with only changes in paint color over the years. Casa Camargo, as Casa de Juárez, has historical significance. Its primary function was residential, but it has changed over the years. It is currently a cultural museum. It has distinctive elements, such as the use of brick in the corners of its façades and as sun protection. Its interior has been completely modified in terms of materiality. In Nuevo León, both case studies are notable examples of the evolution of vernacular architecture. Despite stylistic differences, given that the second case study implements neocolonial elements, both buildings showcase key elements found in Nuevo León's vernacular architecture through their materials—ashlar stone in walls and oak wood on beams, the layout of the central courtyard, and construction techniques.

Elements to be used in contemporary residential architecture: Use of traditional materials such as adobe and ashlar stone; wooden ceilings and beams; ironwork on windows and doors; courtyards and arches, warm colour palettes; height (hot semi-arid climate); passive sustainable strategies and wall thickness.

Table 1. Comparative of typologies

	Casa de Juárez	Casa Camargo	Casa del Campesino	Hacienda Verona
Typology				
#Floors	1	1	1	1
Height	5m	4m	5.5m	5.5m
Original Colour	Red	White	White/ yellow/ red	White
Original function	Single-family house	Single-family house	Single-family house	Single-family house
Actual function	Museum	Museum	Museum	Events
#Pacios	1	0	3	1
Type of arches	Segmental arches	-	Three cantered arches	Three cantered arches
Type of column	Round/ionic	Squared / non-exposed	Round/ionic	Round / Tuscan
Foundation	-	-	Cyclopean foundation	-
Pavement finish	Rock, marble, and wood	Wood and marble	Polished concrete	Ceramic
walls	Adobe	Adobe	Ashlar	ashlar
wall thickness	0.5m	0.5m	1m	0.4m
Interior wall finish	Lime and sand mortar	Lime and sand mortar	Lime and sand mortar	Lime and sand mortar
Exterior wall finish	Lime and sand mortar	Lime and sand mortar	Lime and sand mortar	Lime and sand mortar
ceiling	wood	wood	wood	wood
Roofs	Concrete	Tile	Concrete	Tile
Doors	wood	wood	wood	wood and steel
window	wood and steel	wood and steel	wood and steel	wood and steel

Conclusion

In conclusion, similarities were observed between vernacular architecture in Chihuahua and Nuevo León, such as the presence of arches in the interior courtyards of the Casa de Juárez, the Casa Camargo, and the Casa del Campesino buildings. The ironwork detailing in the four vernacular dwellings is also present, merely protecting windows and doors. The vernacular architecture analyzed in this research focused on residential aspects, which is

interesting given how these buildings' simple, functional structure allows for variations in functional elements, as they currently serve entirely different functions, focusing on social and cultural aspects. It's worth noting that these vernacular aspects seem to be observed less in current architecture, leading to thermal discomfort. One key feature often missing is the central courtyard, which traditionally played a vital role in regulating indoor temperature. By promoting natural ventilation and creating shaded, cooler areas within the home, courtyards helped reduce the harsh climatic conditions typical in both regions. Knowing vernacular architecture allows future architects to build a solid foundation for designing with sensitivity and responsibility. Before designing, it is essential to understand architecture not as an isolated product but as a comprehensive response to the environment, available resources, and social dynamics. The final reflection remembers a phrase that Heyn-Jones (2022) said about vernacular architecture, the author situates the vernacular as 'remittance house' and discusses the materialities and temporalities of these operas calling them 'dream houses', it refers to the thermic efficiency and the original proportion of the constructions declaring that houses in themselves are a work of art to perform art.

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Conflict of Interests

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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