Abstract
This paper examines the purported misogyny of José Clemente Orozco’s representations of women by situating one of his more egregious images, the grinning prostitute in his 1934 mural Catharsis, within the aesthetic and political discursive context of international modernism, industrial modernity, and urban development. By locating the production of this mural within a particular moment in postrevolutionary Mexico and attending to the political significance of its venue, the essay suggests that Orozco’s image might best be understood as a critique of academic allegory in general, and more specifically, a critique of the renewal of Porfrian civic rhetoric with the completion of the Palace of Fine Arts. By interrogating Orozco’s gendered iconography in this way, I argue we are better able to understand how female allegory, public art, and the nation-state were being articulated in postrevolutionary Mexico, thereby enabling an appreciation of both the insights and limits of Orozco’s gendered iconography.