



PRE-COLUMBIAN ART

The inhabitants of ancient Peru have left us a vast legacy that offers an understanding of their particular worldview. Despite the undisputable beauty of the pieces we find gathered in these galleries, they were not created as works of art, nor were they purely decorative objects or depictions of actual customs. In most cases, these pieces were conceived as symbols of power and elements for use in rituals of life and death. With very few exceptions, they were found at the burial sites of important individuals, whether as offerings to the gods or as personal belongings, which having been used by the deceased in life, could be necessary on his journey to the afterlife. The museum's collection of Pre-Columbian art thus offers us a window into the universe of beliefs, values, and customs of the societies that inhabited the Andean region before the European conquest.

Room 2a

ART IN THE ANDES

The journey to the afterlife and the relationship between the world of the living and the world of the dead was one of the underlying concerns of Pre-Columbian societies. This conception of the world demanded the creation of objects aimed at securing the benevolence of ancestors and gods, thus ensuring political order, natural balance, and social wellbeing. We can gain a better idea of this particular worldview mainly through ceramics, an expressive, widely available medium that was the main component in the manufacture of ritual objects during Pre-Columbian times. This series of pieces displays the most important pottery styles produced in the region from the Formative period to the European Conquest.

Room 3

SPACE AND ENVIRONMENT

From the very beginning of the occupation of the Andes, societies established in the region had to face a highly diverse and complex environment. Ideology and religion played a fundamental role in the course of the long process of adaptation to this context. The use of marine resources and the cultivation of land depended in large part on favorable weather, which the inhabitants believed could be altered by divine forces. These societies thus sacralized the elements of nature, giving shape to godly animals and deified beings with which they maintained contact and worshipped in rituals overseen by ruling priests. This gallery shows some of the ways in which Andean societies interpreted and made use of their surroundings.

Room 4

PRE-COLUMBIAN TEXTILES

Among the Incas' first gifts to the Spanish Conquistadors were objects made not of gold, but of alpaca and camelid fibers. Imbued with a complex symbolism, throughout the Pre-Columbian period textiles possessed a special value, which was used to transmit messages and mark social differences. Based on their manufacture and provenance, we know that they had ritual functions, were made to be worn by elites in special ceremonies or were used as banners in the decoration of walls. Nonetheless, the finest weaves to have been preserved have been mostly found at burial sites, and were made to serve the deceased in their journey to the afterlife.

Room 4

ANDEAN METALWORK

The discovery and transformation of metals such as gold, silver, and their alloys was the result of a complex process that forged one of the main artistic traditions of the Pre-Columbian period. Metal was used to create symbols of prestige, instruments, as well as ceremonial objects. Through their shine and the sounds they produced, metal adornments fulfilled important ritual functions. Crowns, breastplates, nose and earpieces were probably worn in life by the governing class as symbols of status, although they were often produced specifically as grave goods. Some of the most widely used techniques in the Andes included lamination, casting, rolling, hammering, embossing and fretwork.

Room 6

PRE-COLUMBIAN DESIGN

The groups of objects in this gallery reveal the richness of Pre-Columbian design, defined through geometric motifs that form decorative patterns. Though from the perspective of the present they may be viewed as purely formal elements, they generally resulted from the extreme stylization of figurative forms. Thus, icons such as waves, crosses, steps, or triangles may be interpreted as part of a symbolic language that expresses complex worldviews. They remain, nonetheless, forms motivated by a clear aesthetic program. Thus, much like today we identify ancient cultures through their formal language, it is likely that in the past these styles were also perceived as indicators of identity.

Room 7

RITUAL AND MYTH THE NORTH

One of the primary functions of Pre-Columbian art was to serve as a medium for the depiction and dissemination of a series of beliefs and ideologies. On the northern coast, the designs applied on vessels and temple walls formed part of a limited number of scenes depicting ceremonies and myths, conceived as a way to guarantee order in the world and control over the forces of nature. Recurrent themes include burial scenes as well as ritual combats and the sacrifice of prisoners. Recent archaeological finds in burial contexts suggest that some of the figures appearing in these representations actually existed.

Room 8

RITUAL AND MYTH THE SOUTH

Toward the end of the first millennium before Christ, the Paracas culture dominated the coastal valleys of southern Peru. While its architecture does not seem to have achieved the complexity of buildings of the northern tradition, its ceramic style and refined textiles are recognized as one of the most important traditions of the ancient world. Paracas art was continued by the Nasca, who emerged around 200 A.D. and remained influential for over five centuries. The Nasca worldview was centered on the transformation of human beings into ancestors after death. Thus, many objects formed part of the funeral attire that accompanied the deceased in his symbolic transfiguration. Their use in ritual celebrations may have enabled the officiants to acquire divine powers.

Room 9

INCA

With some precedents in the societies that flourished in the Southern Highlands and the Altiplano, the Inca empire emerged in the fifteenth century A.D., barely one hundred years before the European conquest. Despite its short duration, the empire integrated the knowledge of the peoples that preceded them and expanded its domain from present-day Ecuador and Colombia to northwest Argentina. In Cuzco, capital of the conquered territories, Inca hegemony made itself felt through a distinctive architectural style based on carved stone blocks, an integrated network of roads, an organized system of agricultural terraces and a formal language that gave priority to geometric motifs and elements of nature.

COLONIAL ART

The Spanish conquest of the Inca Empire in 1532 resulted in the disappearance of many Pre-Columbian aesthetic forms and the imposition of Western art. The emergence of a Colonial society transformed Andean visual culture, as it saw the introduction of an artistic language based on images taken from reality, by contrast to the essentially abstract and geometric nature of Inca art. Genres such as easel painting, polychrome sculpture, or engraving –which had no Pre-Columbian precedents– allowed for the didactic depiction of sacred scenes or complex dogmas useful in teaching a new faith to an indigenous population lacking a tradition of writing. The initial presence of European artists gave way to the growing importance of local masters, as well as the emergence of two main artistic traditions based in Lima and Cuzco. Polarized between aesthetic autonomy and the emulation of European models, these “schools” would broadly define the art of the Viceroyalty.

Room 11

ANDEAN IDENTITY. MEMORY AND INVENTION

While easel painting, an imported genre, allowed the creation of images associated with Andean history and Christian reinterpretations of ancient myths, art forms with strong local roots such as silverwork, ceramics, or textiles maintained a degree of continuity with Pre-Columbian traditions. They served to forge new identities and reinvent the past. Ancient forms, such as *keros* and *pacchas*, continued to fulfill some of the ritual functions of the preceding period, though they gradually adapted to meet the demands of the new Colonial society. The memory of the Inca past was also explicitly taken up through works commissioned by Andean nobles, Creoles and castes, who sought legitimacy in the shadow of the ancient Inca rulers. antiguos incas.

Room 12

THE CREATION OF COLONIAL ART

Although painting and sculpture were of great importance in the early process of evangelization, their sustained development did not begin until the late sixteenth century, thanks to the local presence of three important Italian masters: Mateo Pérez de Alesio, Bernardo Bitti, and Medoro Angelino. They left behind numerous followers, such as Gerónimo Gutiérrez, who prolonged their influence and helped to expand it through their travels. Sculpture, on the other hand, depended for a long time on the circulation of Sevillian works and artists, who defined the guidelines of local taste until well into the seventeenth century. Building on this foundation, in dialogue with the circulation of European prints and works, authentic traditions or “schools” of Viceregal art began to take shape.

Room 13

THE DECORATIVE ARTS

The Viceroyalty of Peru was an important market for the decorative arts and luxury goods produced in places as far away as Europe and Asia. Commercial trade enabled the circulation of a wide variety of furniture, which initially included meticulously constructed desks decorated with ebony, tortoiseshell, and ivory inlays. The demand for these pieces, originally imported from Spain, seems to have led to the appearance of imitations produced in different parts of the Andean region. It would not be until the eighteenth century, however, that local production would clearly distance itself from those models in order to freely incorporate its own elements of design and ornamentation. European and Asian luxury goods, nevertheless, continued to circulate and to inspire local tastes.

Room 14A

DRAWING

Framed by the grand tradition of history painting, academic training in the nineteenth century privileged the representation of the human figure and the study of the live model. In this context, drawing was considered the foundation of the visual arts, whether as a rapid notation of a visual perception or as a preliminary sketch in the conception of a work of art. Through the drawings shown here one can follow, step by step, the gradual acquisition of the craft, from the study of geometry and anatomy to studies from nature, as well as the use of drawing as a preparatory sketch for complex pictorial compositions.

Room 14B

COSTUMBRISMO

Colonial painting, centered on religious subjects, produced few images of local customs and landscapes. This would change with the spread of Enlightenment towards the end of the eighteenth century, when a new secular worldview favored visual description. The representation of local customs gained momentum after Independence, when artists created a vast repertoire of images that described dresses and customs. A new local tradition was gradually built, at the very moment when international trade and modernization displaced the traditions described in watercolors and prints. The broad diffusion and frequent repetition of these images gave the genre a new role in the consolidation of the image of the nation.

Room 15

THE SUBJECTS OF LOCAL ART

Although Colonial painting took inspiration from European models, differences gradually emerged that gave it a distinct character. Subjects neglected or scarcely explored in Europe achieved unprecedented popularity in Peru, while others were the product of local inventiveness. Thus, the old depictions of the Trinity, long rejected in European art, gained renewed vigor in a context that stressed the

didactic value of the image. Likewise, harquebusier archangels put a peculiar twist on the angelic guardians made popular by Sevillian workshops in the seventeenth century. In the figures of Saint Anthony Abbott and Saint Thomas, the erudite university culture of Cuzco also found a means of expression through complex symbolic compositions conceived in response to local disputes.

Room 16-17

THE TRIUMPH OF THE CUZCO SCHOOL

The splendor of art in Cuzco consolidated in 1673, with the arrival of Bishop Manuel de Mollinedo y Angulo. As the former parish priest of the Church of La Almudenain Madrid, Mollinedo was familiar with the propagandistic use of images in Spain's center of political power, a model he would replicate in his diocese through the promotion of local artistic production. Mollinedo also owned a notable collection of Spanish painting that would prove to be a major influence on masters such as the indigenous painter Basilio de Santa Cruz. This flourishing art scene finally helped shape a local style, characterized by extreme idealization and an ornamental spirit expressed through the use of surface gilding, which became fashionable in cities as far away as Santiago de Chile and Buenos Aires.

Room 18

SILVERWORK

After the rescue of Inca Atahualpa, the discovery of Potosí's Cerro Rico determined the early surge of silver mining. Through the forced labor of thousands of Indians, the region saw a wave of silver production that had no precedents in modern history. Thus, South American silver not only supported the Spanish monarchy, but radically transformed the world economy. At the same time, the large commercial circuit linking Huancavelica, Cuzco and Potosí lent a renewed cultural unity to the southern Andean region. The wealth and originality of silver objects is one of the most vital expressions of this regional culture. Silver became the symbol of the political and ecclesiastical power and splendor of the Viceroyalty. Every aspect of daily life was marked by the presence of silver.

Sala 19-20

THE END OF THE VICEREGAL PERIOD

In the second half of the eighteenth century, coinciding with the final splendor of the Cuzco school, cities throughout the Viceroyalty began to assimilate a new aesthetic ideal rooted in European Rococo and Classicism. Local masters, however, interpreted this inspiration through their own expressive needs, in a context where religious subjects predominated. The new spirit made its presence felt in Lima or Quito, centers more closely associated with European tastes. The capacity to emulate cosmopolitan tendencies would give artists like the Lima painter Cristóbal Lozano an unprecedented recognition in the Colonial world. In places as far away as Huamanga, Classicism emerged in austere works which demonstrated a notable local reworking of Enlightenment styles.

Room 21

DEVOTIONS SIGNS OF IDENTITY

Given the fame of their miraculous powers, many sculptures of Christ or the Virgin Mary were the object of widespread devotion, spreading far beyond the sanctuaries where they originated. This led the faithful to commission copies in the form of paintings, engravings, or small sculptures, which could be "touched" by the originals and partake of their prodigious powers. When taken to painting, the "true portraits" of these sculptures also depicted the ritual surroundings in which they were venerated. The society of the time, made up of different ethnic and social groups, used many of these effigies as an affirmation of regional or group identities. The most popular cults not only forged bonds between different social strata, but also allowed the possibility of imagining shared symbols.

REPUBLICAN ART

The proclamation of independence in 1821 announced the end of Spanish domination. With the Republic, local society began a process of secularization that limited Church commissions and gave impulse to genres such as portraiture and paintings of types and customs. The isolation of vast parts of the interior fostered the regional production of luxury goods, such as textiles, gourds, silverwork, and Huamanga stone carvings. In Lima, elites would take distance from local traditions starting in the 1840s, with the emergence of a generation of painters trained in Europe who sought to insert themselves in an international scene. The activity of these artists marked a true rupture with Colonial art, imposing a new conception of the fine arts. The coexistence of different artistic periods and ideals, as well as the constant tension between tradition and modernity, has defined Peruvian art until the present.

Room 22

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Colonial artistic traditions remained in force throughout most of the Andean region, especially in those cities further away from the coast and less influenced by international trade. In its isolation, provincial art maintained continuity with traditional religious cults and older forms of artisanal production. As a result, a growing rift emerged between the art of the capital, which sought to keep up with the latest cosmopolitan developments, and that produced in the rest of the country. Rural areas were characterized by the development of an art directly related to agriculture and farming, that invested traditional religious images with a magical, ritual purpose.

Room 23A

FOTOGRAFIA

In 1842, the arrival of Maximiliano Danti to Lima marks the beginnings of photography in Peru. Dependant on a global industry of specialized materials and equipment, the medium allowed for an unprecedented technical currency and visual contemporaneity. On this basis, during the guano era photography documented the development of archaeology, mining, railroad construction and the building of ambitious urban works. Where painting evaded the representation of the local landscape, photography fixed some of the earliest views of the vast local geography. No other medium contributed as much to forge a shared vision of the nation.

Room 24, 29

THE PORTRAIT: IMAGE OF A NEW SOCIETY

The first Republican images, which were intended to replace the symbols of the Spanish Empire, were based on forms of representation inherited from the Colonial era. It should be no surprise, then, that the most common pictorial genre of the period was the portrait, which had been used as a means to affirm the power of the Church and the Viceregal court. Portraiture became a privileged medium for the depiction of the new ruling classes and the greatest source of work for the region's painters, who now had to compete with the arrival of foreign artists in search of new markets. Although the genre maintained its old social functions, it also became a means of affirmation of the artist's own identity and of a new aesthetic ideal.

Room 25

THE ACADEMIC IDEAL

Trained from an early age in Europe, Ignacio Merino played a decisive role as the teacher of the first generation of academic painters. The artist brought with him a new conception of painting as a liberal art, which stood in opposition to Colonial precedents. Painters such as Francisco Laso, Francisco Masías, and Luis Montero trained with him, later undertaking studies in France and Italy, then considered the centers of art on the new international stage. Merino would have a long and successful career in Paris, which positioned him as one of the most admired Latin American painters of his time. His large-scale historical compositions made him a reference for later generations who sought to create a local variant of European academic painting.

Room 26

FRANCISCO LASO: IMAGINING PERU

Of the first generation of painters trained in Europe, Francisco Laso developed the most original approach, reworking French academicism and adapting it to the particularities of Peruvian reality. While the rigor of his compositions reflects the lessons learned in the Parisian workshop of Charles Gleyre, the subjects of his paintings reveal an ongoing preoccupation with his native country. He was the first to establish the image of the Peruvian Indian, and also the creator of emblematic national images. His critical vision was forged in his work as a writer and liberal politician. In some paintings, such as *The Washerwoman*, Laso seems to approach *costumbrismo*, while in others, such as *The Three Races*, his critical position becomes more evident.

Room 27

THE LAST ACADEMIC

Trained in the discipline of the nineteenth-century academies, Carlos Baca-Flor remained faithful to the great European tradition, which he attempted to preserve from the onslaught of the vanguards of his time. His career, begun in Santiago de Chile, unfolded almost entirely abroad. After a brief stay in Lima between 1887 and 1890, he left for Europe to train in Italian and French academies. Around that time, he undertook a series of small works depicting Paris night scenes, which approximate Modernist painting of the period. While his work is now identified with those fluid sketches, he would achieve international fame as a high-society portraitist with works that reconciled the great European pictorial tradition with a realism inspired by photography.

Room 28

THE END OF A CENTURY

In the late nineteenth century, the lack of exhibition spaces, of an art market, and informed criticism led to the continued emigration of Peruvian artists. Thus, the notable painters of the period spent most of their careers in Europe, where they produced landscapes, courtly figures, and domestic interiors, determined by the tastes of official circles. Some, such as Carlos Baca-Flor, Federico del Campo, Daniel Hernández, and Alberto Lynch received recognition and awards in the French salons. Locally, the end of the century was also defined by the development of intimate portraits and landscape scenes. Aesthetic debates would only be renewed with the appearance of Teófilo Castillo, a painter who promoted artistic activity and the development of a national art.

MODER ART

In Peru, the breaking point between nineteenth-century academicism and modern art is linked to the consolidation of artistic institutions at a time marked by the intense exploration of the idea of a national art. It is no coincidence, then, that many of the most innovative proposals, such as Indigenism, emerged from the official circles of the National School of Fine Arts. The artists associated with the international avant-garde, on the other hand, withdrew into independent groups active in alternative spaces, such as illustrated magazines. A constant dynamic thus arose throughout the twentieth century between different nationalist movements, which tended to look inwards, and the desire of cosmopolitan artists to engage with current international developments.

Sala 30

THE FIRST MODERNISTS

In the 1920s avant-garde art developed in minor genres such as book and magazine illustration, as well as other small-scale formats. Its main proponents, like Carlos Quípez Asín, had evolved from a symbolist aestheticism to the assimilation of Futurism and Cubism. A period of conservative regimes, beginning in 1930, would ultimately limit these explorations to small groups such as that of "Los Duendes" ("The Elves"), centered around the poet and artist José María Eguren. Some figures, such as Antonino Espinosa Saldaña, achieved a certain renown with an oeuvre marked by the influence of Art Deco. However, it would be the painter and poet César Moro who would propose the most radical rupture, which coalesced in 1935 when he organized in Lima the first surrealist exhibition in Latin America.

Room 31

INDIGENISM

In the 1920s, one flank of the avant-garde was defined by Indigenism, an artistic movement that emerged as part of a wide-ranging cultural and political program focused on the vindication of vernacular culture. Within the official framework of the National School of Fine Arts, José Sabogal spearheaded the search for a national art. Along with his disciples, he formed part of the so-called Indigenist group, who promoted the recovery of the image of the Indian and an idealized rural world. They thus promoted independent artists like Mario Urteaga, a self-taught provincial painter praised as the paradigmatic figure of an authentic Indigenism. In the 1930s, the discourse of mestizaje led these artists to include coastal and Amazonian motifs as part of a broader and more integrated vision of the country.

Room 32

MODELS FOR A NATIONAL ART

The first half of the twentieth century was marked by the search for a national art, understood as the expression of an uninterrupted continuity dating back to the origins of civilization in the Andes. In this context, artists explored the history of Peruvian art in an effort to identify models that might serve as the basis for contemporary works. The rescue of Pre-Columbian or even Colonial ornamental motifs seemed to open up the possibility of giving form to an authentically "Peruvian" decorative language. The Indigenists, on the other hand, proposed the models of folk art, considered a *mestizo* expression that captured the fusion of indigenous and Hispanic traditions.

Room 33

THE COSMOPOLITAN ALTERNATIVE

In the mid-1930s, a new generation of artists attempted to forge an alternative to Indigenism and renovate the local artistic scene. The First Independent Artists' Salon of 1937 brought together works from different tendencies to form a common front against the position occupied by Indigenism in official spheres. The exhibition marked a turning point in the process of Peruvian art, which would culminate in José Sabogal's departure from the School of Fine Arts in 1943. The "independents" explored variants of Modernist formalism. Thus, the still life and the nude, as pictorial pretexts free of local allusions, came to define a new cosmopolitanism. At the same time, in order to differentiate itself from Indigenism, landscape turned to coastal scenes and gradually abandoned Andean referents.

Room 34

THE TRIUMPH OF ABSTRACTION

The 1950s mark the beginning of new languages, promoted by a young generation that had emerged in contact with European developments. These artists, gathered around institutions like the Agrupación Espacio or the Galería de Lima, took distance from previous figurative tendencies. After years of intense debates, modern art established itself as the dominant trend and polarized the local art scene between the defense of pure formalism, as promoted by the architect Luis Miró Quesada Garland, and the social demands of the critic Sebastián Salazar Bondy. The early success of geometric art would give way in the following decade to the spread of Informalism and a shift toward the use of Pre-Columbian referents, which became an important way of giving abstraction a local identity.

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