

Introduction

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“...the only possessions worth having are those that possess us by opening the sleeping gates of the imagination”

George Woodcock (Incas and Other Men 1959: 263)

“Things have a life of their own. It’s simply a matter of waking up their souls”, advises Melquíades, the purveyor of wonders and technological miracles, in Gabriel García Márquez’s, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Taking his advice, *Luminescence. The Silver of Peru* uses research drawn from indigenous and Western narratives---history, archaeology, anthropology and visual studies---to explicate the different meanings, significance and values that have been applied to silver during nearly three millennia of Peruvian history; a veritable reawakening of the metal’s many ‘souls’ and a revelation of the diverse natures that have been attached it.

This book deepens and expands the themes introduced in the exhibition of the same title. Carole Fraresso and Ulla Holmquist’s opening paper provides an eloquent cultural history of the use and significance of gold and silver ‘jewelry’ from 1800 BC to AD 1532, and describes some of the intricate, changing cosmological and political ideas constructed by successive civilizations that inhabited the region. Of particular interest, they note the crucial rupture in the symbolism and significance of precious metals that occurred between earlier civilizations, such as Moche, and their successors, Chimú and Inca, when astral deities, particularly the Moon, together with the sea, and their association with the dead, were given greatly increased importance. Within each of these complex and strategically manipulated systems of ideas, silver and related metals, such as gold, copper and their alloys, constituted systems of material symbols through which social and political relations, the past, present and future and ‘being’ itself, could be expressed, mediated and harnessed for personal and social advantage and spiritual apotheosis.

Carlos Elera focuses on the long period between the rise of Cupisnique (2500-400 BC) and the fall of Chimú in AD 1470 when, in northern Peru, prior to the arrival of the Inca, there flourished a series of spectacular civilizations: Salinar (400-100 BC), Moche (AD 100-750), Lambayeque or Sicán (AD 800-1350) and Chimú (AD 1300-1470). Elera describes the remarkable discoveries made at the Cupisnique site in Jequetepeque and later sites in the Valley of Lambayeque at Sicán. At this latter site pyramidal structures formed ‘funerary temples’ dedicated to important ancestor cults. The discovery here, and at Pampa Grande, of sumptuous elite burials, dating from AD 400, provides unequalled opportunities to better understand the significance of silver and gold in the political exercise of power and authority and its significance in evoking a cosmological complex which incorporated a strong ancestral cult and lunar associations related to an extensive maritime symbolism. Even today in the Valle de La

Leche, in some of those communities, which include Moche descendents, remnant beliefs in the malevolent and beneficial phases of the moon and her affect on human activity continue to persist. After the defeat of Chimú, their metal-smiths, technology, and much of the symbolism, meaning and use of precious metals that had been state regulated, were incorporated into the Inca social organization and political ideology that quickly and efficiently enveloped them.

Our knowledge of the complex worlds of meaning inherent in these powerful material symbols was, after the Spanish Invasion, augmented by written chronicles and testaments, grammatical compendiums and compilations of vocabulary, and new visual sources, recorded both by the foreign aggressors and their victims. From these and other sources on colonial society, it is here argued that much of the value the indigenous world gave to silver and gold was based on their reflective and luminescent qualities. Objects made from gold and silver channeled the light of the sun making them and their holders resplendent and luminous, even against the sandy grain of the desert, or the parched earth of the hills that divide the valleys or form the steps to the high mountains. The slow oxidation of silver might even have been seen as analogous to lunar eclipses, and the metal's ability to transform dazzling sunlight into 'white' light could not have been missed. Luminescence was a fundamental aesthetic quality of Andean civilizations that profoundly affected the appreciation and understanding of colour, light and shadow that continues to be felt in creole and indigenous communities even today.

Silver and gold were not the only primary material symbols through which the luminary power of the celestial bodies became transfigured and evocative of state power and authority. After the Spanish Invasion, the power and the authority precious metals elicited, migrated to religious paintings created by indigenous artists working in Cuzco and elsewhere. At the same time, the Spanish attempted to transform silver, from it having a solely symbolic power into a monetary commodity, a transformation attempted at enormous cost and human misery. While the Spanish were materialistically successful, they failed to fully erase the rich symbolic associations that were infused in reflective and luminescent metals and materials.

The rise and dominance of a creole and mestizo society and the emergence of an indigenous aristocracy had an important impact on the transformation, transmission and later secularization of the significance and usage of silver. On at least three occasions, first, in the XVII-XVIII century Andean Baroque; then in the Inca revivalist movement of the early XIX century, and again in recent decades, silver has been re-evaluated and design, style and production transformed and reinvigorated as a result of the reawakening of indigenous, mestizo and creole interests. In this latter period, between 1995-2012, The Patronato Plata del Perú, has performed an important role in re-stimulating the resurgence of craftsmanship and appreciation for traditional silverwork in Peru. The Patronato has organized prestigious national concourses of international silversmiths and designers; conferences to promote quality and encourage the preservation of techniques and innovation in design. It has conducted research, worked to conserve important historical works in silver and has encouraged and supported international exhibitions such as this.

Silver and luminous materials continue to be an important attribute of Andean identity. It is for this reason that this final section of the exhibition includes the work of some exceptionally talented contemporary artists whose pieces rescue and reconfigure some of the styles or meanings and values evoked by the silverwork of the past. Works like Gregorio Cachi's finely worked tupus or Richard Mamani and Hugo Champi's giant spondylus shell (Mother Spondylus) attest to the continuing fascination with pre-Columbian themes and history. The spondylus was believed in pre-Columbian times to be the food of the gods and in the later periods to be a powerful deity itself closely identified with the cult of the ancestors and the unique meteorological conditions connected to El Niño and La Niña. Richard Mamani's silver version of a portable altar recall wooden versions, known as '*cajas*' or boxes of San Marcos, that were popular in the early XX century and which, from the 1950s, were re-themed to become iconic examples of Peruvian folk art. The pervasiveness and strength of Catholicism and the spatial forms through which faith is expressed; the differentiation of the world into underground hell, earth and the celestial-heavens, together with the various beings and events associated with them, is reiterated in the impressive works of Efraín Daza, Roger Ramos and Mamani. One of the most sentient works in the exhibition, Jessica Zimmermann's large openwork spherical structure of silver wire, evokes 'threads of rain', an important element for fertility and community wellbeing throughout Andean history. Finally, Jorge Pérez's haunting and powerful miniature sculpture, 'Anatomy of an Angel', illustrates the full transmutation of the being from divine herald to surrealist sculpture, reflective of the dramatic transformations and fragmented rearticulations experienced by Andean history itself.

In February 2012, outside the bustling coach station in Oruro, a Bolivian mining town, I met two extraordinary individuals, Santusa Quispe and Damián Flores, a Quechua couple from the small village of Candelaria in Sucre Province. In the brief three days during which we met, they recounted various aspects of their lives: how the world had changed since they were children; stories about animals and the significance of the various exceptionally fine textiles they wove, as well as people's attitudes and declining appreciation for them. Damián Flores, repeatedly showed me a bright, contemporary hanging he had woven, which on our second meeting, his wife, then he himself, described as representing the animal monstrosities, as he had imagined them, that used to inhabit the Cerro de Potosí, once the richest deposit of silver in the world. In the centre-top of his composition, there is a golden figure with raised, outstretched arms and legs, edged by terrible serrated knives, which the weaver described as Supay, or the Devil- who owns all the silver and other metals within the earth. Two weeks later I was talking with another Quechua man in Cuzco, Jorge Soyo, who had a deep knowledge and interest in the meaning and authentication of traditional symbols found in textile designs. Among other things, he spoke of the unusual depiction of condors in textiles from the Bolivian village of Potolo, and explained the bird's power to transform itself into the horned devils, which live underground and are represented by masquerades in the carnivals of Juliaca and Oruro and the Fiesta in honor of the Virgin of Candelaria performed annually in Puno. Jorge Soyo pointed out that in Quechua, the condor and Supay shared the same name. What old Melquíades, García Márquez's itinerant showman magician, called the 'soul' of an object is simply a coda for the histories of all the possible significations, elicitation and evocations potent within things, regardless of whether active or dormant. Melquíades was right: things have multiple 'souls' as indexed in this book and the associated exhibition. They represent a tentative attempt, if you like, of a history of the different ways silver has been imagined.

This exhibition and book would not have been possible without the support, counsel, and enthusiasm of many people and organizations. I want particularly to thank Geoff Burns, President & CEO, Ross Beaty, Chairman, and Michael Steinmann, Executive VP Geology & Exploration, of the Pan American Silver Corp. for their support throughout this ambitious and innovative project. I am also particularly grateful to Kettina Cordero who, over the past three years, discussed at every stage the exhibition's development and translated the texts for the Spanish and English versions of this work. The enthusiasm of The Patronato Plata del Perú was truly extraordinary.

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