

### 3 The Central and South American Collections

The museum's Central and South American collections contain few pieces from the spectacular pre-Columbian civilizations that developed independent of contact with other world cultures. Most of the Museum of Anthropology's collections date instead to the last one hundred years and illustrate the remarkable and inventive syncretic thought of the people of the region. The Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean have enabled continental cultures from Africa, the Americas and Europe to mutually influence each other's development and history. Exploration, colonialism, religious crusades, commercial and technological exchange, social experimentation, cultural dialogue and the movement of populations, for good or bad, have followed the ocean currents to create what has been called an Atlantic civilization. This continual contact has created many common cultural and social characteristics across this vast area. Archipelagos like the Azores, the Canary Islands and the Caribbean provided important stopping-off points without which neither Portugal or Spain could have created their western maritime empires. Cultural and religious traits spread from these islands to the American mainland, resulting in a rich heritage that includes vibrant carnival celebrations, religion-inspired dances and cultural fusions that have given rise to new kinds of music, literature, gastronomy and syncretic religions like folk Catholicism, Candomblé and Voudoun, or voodoo. The countermovement brought Europe mathematical, astronomical and geographical knowledge from the Muslim principalities of North Africa, along with architectural innovations, medicinal plants and a

lasting influence on European cuisine from the Americas and Africa. Moreover, through trade, settlement and exploitation, Europe accumulated the capital required to initiate the Industrial Revolution, which irrevocably transformed that continent and the world around it.

The museum's collections from the continents that border the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, though currently small and eclectic, provide a good nucleus for future growth. The most important collections have been assembled by academics and specialists closely connected with the University of British Columbia. Collections include impressive holdings of Mexican masks and mid-twentieth-century Andean folk art donated by UBC professors Alfred Siemens and Blanca and Roberto Muratorio; Guatemalan costumes collected by Dr. Elizabeth Johnson; a comprehensive collection of Quechua clothing and textiles from the Andes collected by Mary Frame and impressive holdings of pre-Columbian textiles from the same area; and excellent ceramics from the American Southwest, including works by Maria Martinez and Rachel Nampeyo, collected by Marianne Dozier. Most of this material, generally referred to as "folk art," was made by subsistence farmers, workers or craft specialists, and it pervades nearly every aspect of Latin American life; it is used to embellish, to clothe, to amuse, to express devotion, to contain food and liquids and to communicate with the invisible spirits and natural forces that must be domesticated on a daily basis. The museum's exhibition of Central and South American, Caribbean and Iberian art and artifacts is the only permanent one in Canada dedicated to this part of the world.

- *Object descriptions researched and written by Anthony Shelton (AS).*



### Female figure

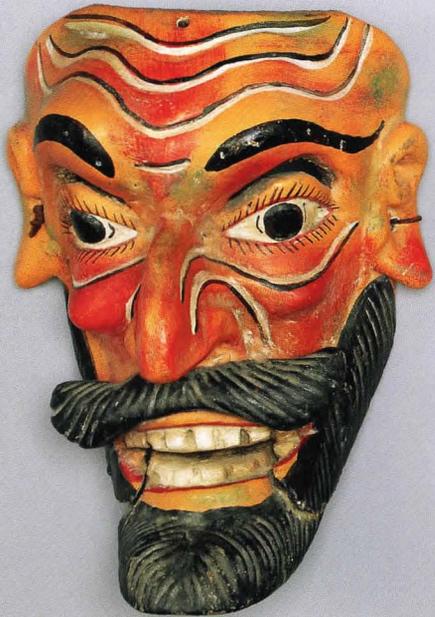
Nayarit or Jalisco, México

200 BCE–500 CE · Clay, paint

45 × 27 cm · N183

Walter C. Koerner Collection

Despite the absence of major architectural sites, the western Méxican states of Colima, Nayarit and Jalisco witnessed the growth of advanced Mesoamerican civilizations similar to those in central and south México. The region is famous for its hollow, remarkably naturalistic ceramic redware figures, though little is known about them. A few figures have been found in often elaborate shaft tombs, a mortuary structure unique to this region. Most came into museum collections without any accurate provenance. Some experts think the main figure found in such burials may represent a powerful, elite member of the society; other figures may depict retainers sacrificed to accompany that person in the afterlife. The seated female figure shown here holds a rattle, which suggests she was participating in a religious ceremony. Other figures commonly depict warriors, pregnant women, acrobats, male and female couples both seated and standing, and women with children. (AS)



## Masks used in the Dance of the Moors and the Christians

The Dance of the Moors and the Christians, along with other dance dramas, were introduced into México by Franciscan missionaries as early as the sixteenth century, as a means of converting indigenous peoples to Christianity. Some of these dances were already popular in parts of Europe. Dances depicting Moors and Christians were performed in Aragón and Burgundy as early as the twelfth century; they spread south to Valencia and Murcia and west to Galicia and Portugal before converging in Castile in the fifteenth century. Many versions of this dance—some of which included dialogue that focussed on the struggle between the Christians, led by Santiago, and the Moors—were adapted to represent the archetypal battle between Spanish Christianity and different “pagan” faiths. In most versions it is the Spanish who eventually win over the native population, whether they be Muslim or the indigenous peoples of the Americas. But in a few versions, such as the Dance of the Plumes, recorded in the valley of Oaxaca in central México, and the Dance of the Tastoanes, in Jalisco, the victors are the indigenous protagonists. With God’s help, the indigenous people outwit the Spanish by killing Santiago, who is admonished by God in death for fighting on the side of the sinful Europeans. Santiago requests absolution and is resurrected, after which he leads the indigenous warriors to victory over their tormentors. (AS)

**Masks** (top row Moors,  
bottom row Christians)

México

Twentieth century · Wood, paint

*clockwise from top left:*

23.7 × 18.5 × 2.5 cm; 26 × 16 × 11 cm;

23 × 16 × 12 cm; 43 × 24 × 16 cm;

31 × 23.5 × 12.5 cm; 28 × 24 × 17.5 cm

*clockwise from top left:*

2655/104; 2655/33; 2655/126; 2655/136;

2655/132; 2655/159

Donor: Alfred H. Siemens

## Mask

Cora. Sierra del Nayar, Nayarit, México

Twentieth century

Papier-mâché, paint, hair, fibre

42.8 × 29.4 × 29.1 cm · 2655/3

Donor: Alfred H. Siemens

The Cora, who are among the most isolated indigenous groups in México, were conquered only in the eighteenth century. The Cora religion is a mix of Catholicism and indigenous beliefs with many pre-Hispanic mythical and ritual elements. Nowhere is this more in evidence than during Easter Week celebrations when masks like the one shown here are used to represent the Judeos (Jews).

The youths who play the role of the Judeos fashion their own papier-mâché masks. Under the command of their captains, they begin their hunt for Jesus Christ. After Christ's death, the Judeos take over the village, fighting each other with wooden swords, dancing and threatening anyone who fails to acknowledge their authority. The usual order of the world is reversed; speech is replaced by babble, buffoons taunt onlookers and chaos ensues. With the resurrection of Christ, power reverts to the civil leaders and the Judeos collapse in spasms, eventually washing the paint off their bodies and burning their masks as order is returned to the community. (AS)





**Retablo** (portable altar)  
**with figure of Santiago**

Artist: Antonio Suplehuiche  
Gualaceo, Ecuador

c. 1977 · Wood, glass, paint, metal  
40.6 × 23.7 × 13.2 cm · 2721/1

Blanca and Ricardo Muratorio Collection

The intercession of Christ, the Virgin and various saints in everyday affairs is sought by believers throughout Latin America. In some communities, religious images may be ritually bathed and fed, with devotion shown them through dance performances, processions and pilgrimages. In México, Guatemala and the Andean Republics, elaborate masquerades are regularly performed in their honour.

This small shrine is dedicated to Santiago, the warrior saint revered by the Spanish conquerors and later taken up by indigenous people. Santiago's followers thought him a powerful supernatural being and, among other things, associated him with an ability to cure the sick. (AS)

### Storage jar

Canelos Quichua, Pastaza Province, Ecuador  
Late 1970s or early 1980s · Clay, paint  
22 cm (diameter) × 30 cm · 2721/2  
Blanca and Ricardo Muratorio Collection

Canelos religious thought, which recognizes a mythical world of ancestors and spirit beings, patterns the future on past transformations. Sungui is the spirit master of the Water World and the first shaman, and Nungwi is the spirit mistress of garden soil and pottery clay. Male shamans receive visions that are interpreted by master potters, who are mostly women.

The Canelos people are best known for their effigy pots and figures. Traditionally these were used for domestic ceremonies, but today they are also made for the tourist market. The effigy pots feature jungle animals, fish people, shamans, spirit masters and imagery that sometimes parody the modern world. The zigzag design on the neck of the jar shown here represents a river, with the lines of dots and small triangles symbolizing the anaconda. Alternating hexagons on the body of the pot represent the iguana, which is flanked by imagery derived from tortoises and turtle shells. (AS)





### Mask representing the devil

Oruro, Bolivia

Twentieth century

Clay, glass, paint, plaster? wood

32.6 × 25.8 × 18.8 cm · 1362/1 a-d

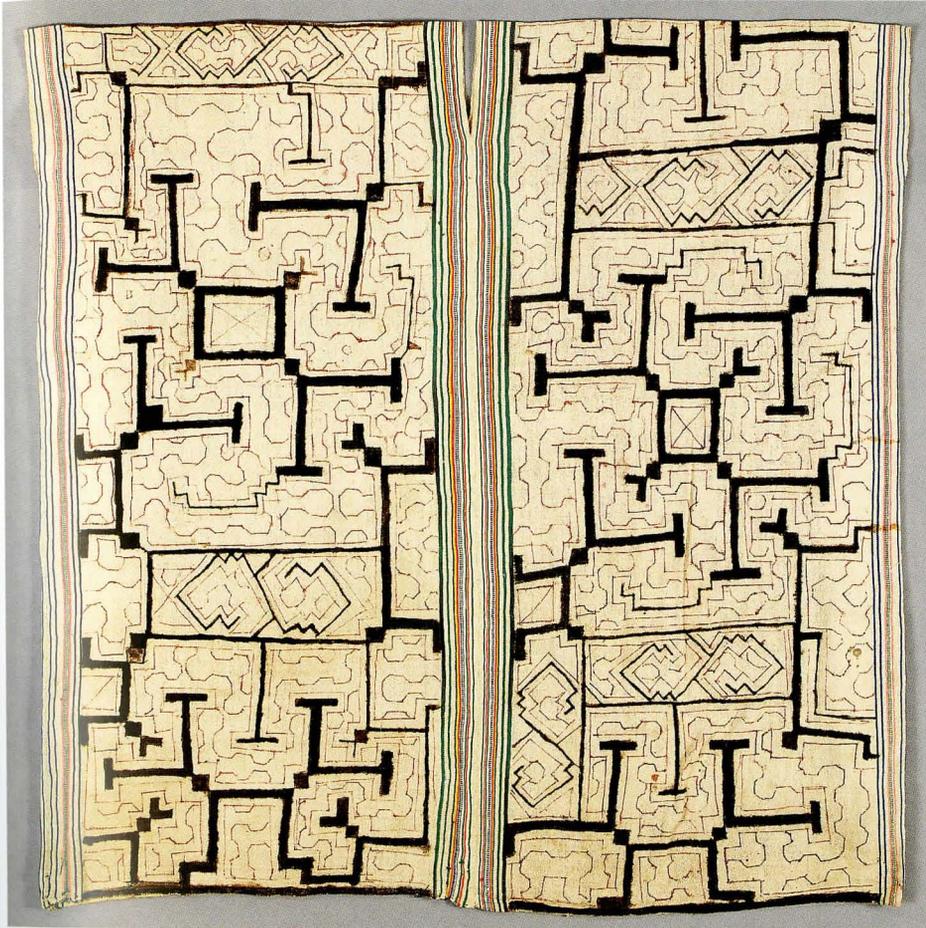
Donor: Nancy Miller

Masked devil impersonators are common in religious dances across México and the Andes. In México, devil masks can be either the simple horned type,

which closely resemble European Christian iconography, or complex, fearsome animalistic masks that developed as a fusion between Christian concepts of the devil and the indigenous belief in *naguals* (spirit helpers). In most contemporary Méxican dance dramas, the devil plays the part of a trickster or buffoon who entertains the audience with sexual jokes, innuendo and scurrilous commentary.

In the Bolivian tin mining town of Oruro, a male and a female devil, Tio (or Supay) and Tia, are believed to control the earth's buried riches, and they are placated and given offerings to ensure the miners' safety and success.<sup>1</sup> During carnival, masked devil dancers invade Oruro until the town's protectress, the Virgin of Socován, banishes them back to their underground home. (AS)





### Tunic

Shipibo, Peru

Twentieth century · Cotton fibre and dye

109.2 × 109.9 cm · Se130

Museum purchase

*facing page:*

### Storage jar

Shipibo, Peru

Twentieth century · Clay, caraibe bark ash,

pigment, resin

48 cm (diameter) × 51.5 cm · Se160

Museum purchase

Pre-contact Amerindian pottery, such as the magnificent Marajoara wares excavated from the Lower Amazon, shows great sophistication. The Shipibo and Canelos Quichua people in today's Peruvian and Ecuadoran Amazon are renowned for their intricately decorated jars used to store and ferment manioc beer. Pottery is made by women, and though designs on the pottery are thought to be derived from visions, several women who seem to share nearly identical visionary experiences may decorate a large pot. The coiling techniques used to build a pot are compared to the coiling and uncoiling of snakes, and when used for fermentation the pots are said to hiss like vipers. The designs may look identical to the untrained eye, but each pot's lower body is decorated with an anaconda-derived pattern, while the neck is embellished with a design taken from the constellation of the Southern Cross, both important mythological references for the Shipibo. Similar designs can be found in textiles (see tunic at left) and other media. (AS)

### Notes

1. *I Spent My Life in the Mines: The Story of Juan Rojas, Bolivian Tin Miner*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.