

# Art of the Americas

## A Resource Guide for Visiting LACMA

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### About this Guide

This guide contains information and activities that will help you prepare for your students' visit to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA). This guide includes:

- **Information about your tour and about LACMA**
- **Selected works of art with information, questions, and prompts:** These examples represent the types of art, method of discussion, and activities that your students will experience in the galleries. The artworks profiled in this guide may not be on view in the galleries during your tour.
- **Pre-visit Activities:** In preparation for your trip, you may wish to use the featured works and discussion questions in conjunction with the activities listed in the "Before Your Visit to the Museum" section below.
- **Post-visit Activities:** After your trip, extend learning with the activities suggested in the section "After Your Visit to the Museum."
- **Related California Standards:** All LACMA tours for students address Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and other California state standards.
- **Further Resources:** Use these resources in your lesson planning or share them with your students, as appropriate, to provide additional information and background.

### About the Museum

LACMA is the largest encyclopedic museum in the western United States with more than 100,000 works of art. Through its extensive collections, the museum is both a resource to and a reflection of the many cultural communities and heritages in Southern California. The collection includes artworks from various cultures from prehistoric to the present.

### About LACMA School Tours

Student experiences in the museum are grounded in close looking, inference, and inquiry. By closely examining works of art and inferring what is depicted based on observation, students construct their own understandings about works of art. LACMA docents are trained to facilitate discussion rather than lecture about facts and dates, allowing students the opportunity to share what they notice and therefore, what they are naturally interested in discussing. Docents will guide students to come to their own conclusions and use visual evidence to support their opinions. In this method of learning, rather than determining whether answers are "right" or "wrong," students discover the satisfaction of constructing meaning with their peers.

### Introduction to the Tour

This tour surveys the artistic development of the Americas from ancient times to the present. Students compare and contrast art from different historical periods of the Americas, which can include North (specifically 19th century California), Central, and South America, and modern and contemporary art from this area of the world. Students will look closely at works of art from the Americas and explore its richness and diversity and the cultures that produced it. This guide explores the following big idea question that relates to the tour theme – How can art communicate the diversity and richness of the culture of the Americas?

This tour is aligned with state content standards for history/social science for grades 7 and 11, visual arts standards for all grades, and Common Core English Language Arts standards for English Language arts for grades 4–12.

## Before Your Visit to the Museum

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To prepare students for the *Art of the Americas* tour, you may wish to complete the following activities:

### Defining "the Americas"

Prepare students for learning about the art and culture of the Americas by helping them define and locate the Americas. Show students a map of North, Central, and South America. Split the class into three groups associated with each region of the Americas. Have each group conduct Internet research on the religions, government, and population of their respective region and present a brief oral report to the class, making sure to include at least one artwork in their research and oral presentation.

### Old America vs. New America

Inform students that contemporary artists looked to the non-representational art of ancient Meso-American artists for inspiration—creating something "new" from the "old." Have students choose an object or artifact from a native society from the Americas. Taking one element, decoration, or figure from the object as inspiration, have students create a contemporary work of art.

### Capturing Los Angeles

Lead a class discussion about what words or images come to mind when describing Los Angeles. Keep a list of student responses on the board. Have students review the list and discuss how those images came to be; how have they been manifested as the image of Los Angeles? If you'd like, you can expose students to *Angel's Flight* in this guide to show an image of one artist's view of Los Angeles.

Have students take a walk in their neighborhood. Have them write a list of words that describe their neighborhood. Have them compare the list from the class discussion about Los Angeles to the list they wrote about where they live. If they live in a community within Los Angeles, how is the image of the city reflected within their own neighborhoods? If it does not, why? Have the class share their images and discuss the diversity and richness of Los Angeles.

## After Your Visit to the Museum

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Extend your students' learning after their visit to the museum with the following activities:

### One America/Many Americas

Have students reflect on what they learned about the diversity of art and culture of the Americas. Instruct students to choose the artwork that was most memorable and have them think about the following:

- In what region of the Americas was the object/artwork made?
- Does the location in which it was made influence how it looks? If yes, how so?
- In what time period was the object/artwork made?
- How does the time in which it was made influence how it looks?

Have students conduct further research on the object using the LACMA website, placing it in context with information they learned from hearing or presenting about the three regions of the Americas in the "Defining 'the Americas'" activity they completed before their visit to LACMA. Ask students to reflect on the following:

- Is the object they saw at the museum similar or different to the artwork discussed during student presentation?
- If similar, what are those similarities? How do the similarities speak to the universalities of the peoples of the Americas?
- If different, how are those differences manifested? How do the differences reflect the cultural diversity of the Americas?



***Vessel with Glyphic Text***

Guatemala, Petén, Maya, 400–550

Furnishings; Serviceware, ceramic with red, cream, and black slip  
7 x 8½ in. (17.78 x 21.59 cm). Museum Acquisition Fund (AC1992.129.1)  
<http://collections.lacma.org/node/221629>

# Vessel with Glyphic Text

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## About the Work of Art

The writing on the surface of this Mayan vessel states that it was used for drinking cacao, a drink like hot chocolate that was made by grinding cocoa beans. The text also names the vessel's owner and his royal parents. The hieroglyphs appear in reverse order in the vertical panels on the body of the vessel, flanking the head of an underworld supernatural creature in the center.

The Maya were a Mesoamerican civilization that extended from modern-day southern Mexico through Central America. At the height of their achievement, during the Classic period (c. AD 250 to 900), the Maya numbered into the millions, controlling a vast geographical area of city-states. The city-states were controlled through a substantial network of trade and alliances. The reasons for their collapse in the eighth and ninth centuries is still being studied and debated by Mayan scholars.

This vessel, dating to the Classical period of Mayan civilization, was created using the coil method rather than thrown on a potter's wheel. Coils of clay were wrapped around and around, and then smoothed over to make the walls of the vessel. The vessels were set out to dry and then painted or inscribed. Many colors of pigment were used; however, one of the most popular painting techniques involved limiting the color palette to black, red, and cream. This style, which was used on this vessel, was called the "Codex" style since it was similar to the aesthetics of decorations on pre-Columbian books. After decorating, the vessels were fired in a kiln.

## Resources

Miller, Mary Ellen (1999) *Maya Art and Architecture*, Thames and Hudson: New York.

Reents-Budet, Dorie, et al. (1994) *Painting the Maya Universe: Royal Ceramics of the Classic Period*, Duke University Press: Durham, NC and London.

## Discussion Questions and Prompts

Discuss the artwork using the following prompts and questions:

- Look closely at this object. What details or symbols do you see?
- What colors do you see?
- What shapes do you see?
- Describe the different decorative elements on the vessel.
- How does the shape of the vessel help inform us about how this object was used?

Inform students that there is writing on this Mayan vessel that states that it was used for drinking a drink similar to hot chocolate; and it also names the bowl's owner and his royal parents.

## Using Crayola®Model Magic® have students create their own vessel. Ask students to consider the following:

- What shape will your vessel be?
- What will your vessel be used for?
- What is the best shape for the vessel's intended use? (Think about its form and function.)
- Will you include writing on the vessel? If so, what will it say? Will you describe its function and name the owner, similar to the writings on this bowl?
- What colors will you use to decorate the vessel? Why are those colors important to you?
- How will you decorate the surface? What types of shapes or symbols will you use?



***Virgin of Guadalupe (La Virgen de Guadalupe)***

MANUEL DE ARELLANO

(Mexico, active 1691–circa 1722). 1691

Paintings, oil on canvas: 71 <sup>7</sup>/<sub>16</sub> x 48 <sup>9</sup>/<sub>16</sub> in. (181.45 x 123.38 cm)

Framed: 82 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 60 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>4</sub> x 3 <sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> in. (208.92 x 153.04 x 8.89 cm)

Purchased with funds provided by the Bernard and Edith Lewin  
Collection of Mexican Art Deaccession Fund (M.2009.61)

<http://collections.lacma.org/node/220044>



# Virgin of Guadalupe (La Virgen de Guadalupe)

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## About the Work of Art

This painting of the Virgin of Guadalupe is signed and dated by artist Manuel Arellano in 1691. It is a brilliant example of one of the most reproduced and venerated images of the Christian world. According to tradition, in 1531 the Virgin Mary appeared to the recently converted Indian Juan Diego at the hill of Tepeyac, north of Mexico City. She directed him to Bishop Juan de Zumárraga (reigned 1528–1547) so he could build a church for her. When the bishop refused to believe Juan Diego, he returned to the hill where the Virgin appeared to him a second time, asking him to return to the bishop's palace. Juan Diego followed the Virgin's command but was again rebuffed. The Virgin then appeared to Juan Diego a third time, this time instructing him to gather a group of rare flowers to take to the bishop as proof. During his visit to the bishop, Juan Diego unfolded his cloak filled with the extraordinary flowers, revealing the miraculously imprinted image of the Virgin on his tunic. In awe, the bishop fell to his knees and begged the Virgin for forgiveness. According to tradition, the image imprinted on Juan Diego's cloak is the same icon venerated at the Basílica de Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe (Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe) today. The Basilica is one of the most visited Catholic shrines in the world. The miracle of Juan Diego is credited for a mass conversion of indigenous peoples in the Americas to the Catholic faith. The Virgen de Guadalupe became the patron saint of Mexico and the Americas. The image of The Virgin is still one of the most iconic and venerated images in Mexico.

Although the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe goes back to the second half of the sixteenth century, her tradition was only fixed in the mid-seventeenth century when a strong sense of *criollismo* crystallized in New Spain. (*Criollismo* is the strong identification with local traditions that surfaced among the descendants of Spaniards in Spanish America). Throughout the seventeenth century the fame of the Virgin spread rapidly. For example, she was said to have miraculously stopped the flood of 1629, one of the worst natural disasters in the history of Mexico City. In 1666 a group of painters were invited to inspect the image, and declared that it was not painted by human hands. Later, Mexican generals such as Miguel Hidalgo (during the war of Mexican independence, 1810–1821) and Emiliano Zapata (during the Mexican Revolution in 1910) used flags that bore the image of the Virgen de Guadalupe.

Manuel de Arellano is one of the most accomplished painters of Mexico who straddled the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A barely legible inscription above the artist's signature reads: "Tocada al original" (after the original),

which means that Arellano based his depiction on the original image of the Virgin displayed in the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Images that were closer to the original were believed to be more miraculous and were therefore more valued. The Virgin is depicted in the center surrounded by rays of light, encased by a mandorla of delicately rendered flowers. The composition is punctuated with four roundels at each corner that show the various moments of her apparition story. This is the first image of this iconic figure to enter LACMA's collection, an important addition to our growing collection of Spanish colonial art.

*Adapted from "Virgin of Guadalupe (La Virgen de Guadalupe)" on the LACMA Web site at <http://collections.lacma.org/node/220044>*

## Discussion Questions and Prompts

- Is this image familiar? If so, where have you seen it? If not, can you speculate as to who this woman may be?
- Describe the figure.
- Describe her expression.
- Look closely at the four scenes on each of the corners. Share details you notice in each scene.

Referring to "About the Work of Art" briefly tell the story of the Indian Juan Diego. Ask students to look back at the images on the four corners (details are provided on the LACMA website) and continue the discussion about the artwork:

- How is Juan Diego depicted? How would you describe how he is dressed?
- What is his body language communicating in each of the four images?
- How is the story of Juan Diego told?

Inform students of the story of Juan Diego, in which he is credited for a mass conversion of indigenous peoples in the Americas to the Catholic faith. The Virgen de Guadalupe became the patron saint of Mexico and the Americas and her image, as seen in this work of art, is one of the most iconic images in Mexican culture. As a class, come up with a definition of an "icon" and make a list of "iconic" images. Have each student choose an iconic image from the class list, or from his or her background and/or heritage. Have students illustrate, in a medium of their choosing, their iconic image.



***Angel's Flight***

MILLARD SHEETS

(United States, California, Claremont, 1907–1989)

United States, 1931. Paintings, oil on canvas. 50 $\frac{1}{4}$  x 40 in. (127.635 x 101.6 cm)

Gift of Mrs. L. M. Maitland (32.17) © Millard Sheets Estate

<http://collections.lacma.org/node/225837>

# Angel's Flight

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## About the Work of Art

At the beginning of his career, early in the 1930s, Artist Millard Sheets painted several urban views of Los Angeles, including *Angel's Flight*. Unlike other paintings, in which the artist presented traditional views of city structures from ground level, the composition in *Angel's Flight* is unusual. Sheets viewed a poor section of Los Angeles from high on a hill. This inventive vantage point must have seemed logical though, given the unusually steep terrain of the area depicted, which is now known as Bunker Hill.

The title of the painting, *Angel's Flight*, refers to the electric cable railway that was built in 1901 to carry pedestrians on Third Street up the steep hill from Hill Street to Olive, on the top of Bunker Hill. The funicular, or cliff railway, was built south of a road tunnel. At the same time a pedestrian stairway of 123 steps and ten ramps was constructed on the north side to give those who could not afford the railway free access to the top of Bunker Hill. On the crest of the hill, a tall observation tower, known as Angel's View, was constructed. The young women in the painting—the model for both of whom was the artist's wife, Mary—may be standing on either the observation tower or a railway platform on the hilltop. Sheets omitted the famous cable railway and chose to view the scene looking north toward the stairway. He did not depict the stairs as straight, as they actually were, but showed them as meandering up the hill, thereby exaggerating the sense of height. Each of the buildings has a slightly different perspective and vanishing point. Furthermore, the two women placed in the foreground shadow serve as focal elements, introducing the viewer to the scene below, and as a contrast to the brilliantly sunlit hill below, which further exaggerates the perspective.

Sheets's palette is bright and varied, with the apartment buildings and boarding houses painted in vivid orange, red, yellow, and green. The color, combined with the perspective and contrasting light and dark areas, gives the painting a distinctively dynamic quality. Despite its social-realist subject, *Angel's Flight* was a precursor to Sheets's brighter, more decorative postwar compositions. Sheets painted *Angel's Flight* expressly for the 1931 Carnegie International Exhibition in Pittsburgh, the first major international show in which he was invited to participate. In 1932 the painting won a prize for the "most representative work" at the annual exhibition held at the Los Angeles County Museum and was subsequently purchased for the museum. *Angel's Flight* is generally considered to be Sheets's masterpiece.

*Adapted from "Angel's Flight" on the LACMA Web site at <http://collections.lacma.org/node/225837>*

## Discussion Questions and Prompts

Discuss the work of art using the following prompts and questions:

- Describe the body language and posture of the two women. What are they communicating?
- What is happening in the background of the painting?
- Where do you think this is taking place? What details do you see that help inform your opinion?
- What is the vantage point of the artist? (Where was he standing when he painted this)? How does the vantage point influence how you look at the work of art? How does the vantage point give a sense of height?
- Describe the buildings. Do they look realistic? Why or why not?
- Point out the areas of light in the painting. What is happening in these areas?
- Describe the areas that are in the shadows. What is taking place in the shadows?
- How would you describe the mood of this painting? How does the play of light and shadows contribute to this mood?

Inform students that the title of the painting, *Angel's Flight*, refers to the still operating electric cable railway that was built in 1901 to carry pedestrians on Third Street up the steep hill from Hill Street to Olive Street in a poor section of Los Angeles.

Have students take several photographs of a spot in their neighborhood. For each photograph, students should consider the following questions:

- Where will you be standing when you capture the image?
- Stand at a different vantage point and take another picture. How does this vantage point compare with the previous picture? How does the view of your neighborhood change, based on where you are standing?
- Stand on a ladder or kneel down. Take another picture. How does this vantage point compare with the previous pictures?
- What areas will be in light? Which ones will be in shadow?
- Choose your favorite picture and share it with the class by discussing why it's your favorite and the process you went through in taking the picture.





***Allegro***

ROLPH SCARLETT

(Canada, Ontario, Guelph, active United States, 1889–1984)  
United States, circa 1944.

Paintings, oil on canvas. 64½ x 74½ in. (163.83 x 189.23 cm)  
Gift of Fannie and Alan Leslie (M.2001.39) © Rolph Scarlett  
<http://collections.lacma.org/node/186605>

# Allegro

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## About the Work of Art

Throughout artist Rolph Scarlett's career, he experimented with action painting and surrealist art, set and jewelry design. He was born in Ontario, Canada, in 1889. His first art teacher was his grandmother. After graduation from the Loretto Academy, Scarlett joined his family's jewelry business as an apprentice at the age of thirteen. There, he learned to design and manufacture settings for precious stones. In 1907 Scarlett moved to New York City in order to refine his skills as a jewelry designer.

Scarlett continued to work as a commercial jewelry designer, but resumed painting during his spare time. Later, he would move to Los Angeles, where he worked in theater and in the movie business, designing sets for various motion pictures, including *East of Eden*. In 1923 he took a trip to Europe, where he met expressionist artist Paul Klee and was introduced to the work of artist and color theorist Wassily Kandinsky. Scarlett was deeply impressed their work and was greatly influenced by their theories of color. Throughout his career, Scarlett would experiment with action painting and surrealist art, but would continually return to geometric, abstract, non-objective art (artworks without recognizable objects). Influenced by Kandinsky's theories and his own love of music, Scarlett was known for including rhythmic waves, vibrating lines, and geometric forms into his work. *Allegro* captures many of these qualities that are representative of Scarlett's work.

By 1936, Scarlett was back in New York City, where he learned about the collection of art being formed by the philanthropists' Solomon and Irene Guggenheim, with help from German-born curator, Hilla Rebay. The collection assembled by Rebay, which included works by Kandinsky and Klee would form the foundation for the establishment of the Guggenheim Museum, Rebay being its first director. Scarlett attended Rebay's exhibitions and sent her examples of his work; establishing a long and close friendship. By this time, he had developed a geometric style and a unique sensitivity towards color—as can be seen in *Allegro*. Rebay would become one of Scarlett's strongest supporters: awarding him a Guggenheim Fellowship and acquiring many of his artworks for the Guggenheim collection (the museum would eventually own sixty of his paintings).

After Rebay lost her position at the Guggenheim and thus his main supporter and source of income, Scarlett spent his later years in Shady, New York, an artist's colony near Woodstock. He spent his remaining years between painting and jewelry design. He died in New York in 1984 at the age of ninety-five.

## Discussion Questions and Prompts

Discuss the work of art using the following prompts and questions:

- What do you notice about this work of art?
- What shapes do you see?
- What color do you notice first? Why? What did the artist do to draw your eye to that color?
- Describe the different types of lines in the work of art.
- Where do you see positive space (where objects are placed) and negative, or empty space? How did the artist use space to create the composition of this painting?
- Inform students that the artist, Rolph Scarlett, favored geometric, abstract, non-objective art (artworks without recognizable objects). Ask students to describe how each of these elements is reflected in this artwork.
- Inform students that the Principles of Design describe the way artists use the Elements of Art (such as line, color, texture, space). Inform students that balance and movement are two examples of Principles of Design (see "Further Resources" below for definitions). Continue discussing the work of art with the following prompts and questions:
  - Balance is the distribution of the weight of objects, colors and space. Do you think *Allegro* is "balanced?" Why or why not?
  - Movement is the path the viewer's eye takes through the work of art. How did your eye travel through this work of art? What did you notice first? What did you notice next? How did the artist, Scarlett, direct this movement by using lines, shapes, or colors within a work of art?
- Provide students with different colors of construction paper and assorted colored markers. Have students cut out geometric, non-representational shapes of various sizes from the construction paper. On another piece of paper, have students arrange the shapes to create different types of compositions by experimenting with positive and negative space, using different color combinations, and drawing a variety of lines.

## Sources

*Rolph Scarlett: Painter. Designer. Jeweler.* Judith Nasby, McGill Queens University Press, Montreal, Quebec, Canada, 2005  
Rolph Scarlett: <http://www.langsdewal.com/artists/rolph-scarlett>

## California State Content Standards for Visual Arts

### Grade 4

- Artistic Perception 1.5: Describe and analyze the elements of art (e.g., color, shape/form, line, texture, space, value), emphasizing form, as they are used in works of art and found in the environment.

### Grade 6

- Artistic Perception 1.1: Identify and describe all the elements of art found in selected works of art (e.g., color, shape/form, line, texture, space, value).
- Artistic Perception 1.2: Discuss works of art as to theme, genre, style, idea, and differences in media.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.1: Construct and describe plausible interpretations of what they perceive in works of art.

### Grade 7

- Historical and Cultural Context 3.2: Compare and contrast works of art from various periods, styles, and cultures and explain how those works reflect the society in which they were made.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.2: Analyze the form (how a work of art looks) and content (what a work of art communicates) of works of art.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.3: Take an active part in a small-group discussion about the artistic value of specific works of art, with a wide range of the viewpoints of peers being considered.

### Grade 8

- Artistic Perception 1.1: Use artistic terms when describing the intent and content of works of art.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.2: Develop a theory about the artist's intent in a series of works of art, using reasoned statements to support personal opinions.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.3: Construct an interpretation of a work of art based on the form and content of the work.

### Grades 9–12

- Artistic Perception 1.1: Identify and use the principles of design to discuss, analyze, and write about visual aspects in the environment and in works of art, including their own.
- Historical and Cultural Context 3.3: Identify and describe trends in the visual arts and discuss how the issues of time, place, and cultural influence are reflected in selected works of art.
- Aesthetic Valuing 4.1: Articulate how personal beliefs, cultural traditions, and current social, economic, and political contexts influence the interpretation of the meaning or message in a work of art.

## Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts—Grades 6–12

### College and Career Readiness Anchor Standard for Reading

1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
7. Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

### College and Career Readiness Anchor Standard for Speaking and Listening

- Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

## California State Content Standards for History/Social Studies

Note: The following standards may be addressed, depending on which works of art are selected.

### Grade 7

7.7. Students compare and contrast the geographic, political, economic, religious, and social structures of the Meso-American and Andean civilizations.

### Grade 11

11.5 Students analyze the major political, social, economic, technological, and cultural developments of the 1920s.

### Further Resources

J. Paul Getty Museum, "Exploring Photographs, Methods of Visual Analysis" [http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom\\_resources/curricula/exploring\\_photographs/lesson01.html](http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/classroom_resources/curricula/exploring_photographs/lesson01.html)

J. Paul Getty Museum. *Understanding Formal Analysis*. [http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building\\_lessons/formal\\_analysis.html](http://www.getty.edu/education/teachers/building_lessons/formal_analysis.html).

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