LACMA

EVENINGS FOR EDUCATORS 2017–18

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT
LOS ANGELES COUNTY MUSEUM OF ART
5905 WILSHIRE BOULEVARD
LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90036

Crossing Borders

The movement of people, things, and ideas between geographic regions is nothing new. Migration and cultural exchange are as old as human history, and their impact on people's everyday lives can be traced through many forms of material evidence. For those of us living in Los Angeles, migration and cultural exchange between California and Mexico are both significant and familiar: more than fifty percent of the current populations of both California and L.A. County are Latino, and Los Angeles is home to the largest number of Mexican-descent people outside of Mexico City. While California and Mexico's interdependent relationship extends back many centuries, LACMA's exhibition *Found in Translation: Design in California and Mexico, 1915–1985* explores twentieth-century connections between the two regions.

Each of the focus objects in this packet engages with the relationship between Mexico and California differently, revealing a plurality of creative influences and traditions, materials and production techniques, political views, and individual perspectives. We hope that teachers will feel inspired to connect the following four objects with lessons in history, civics and government, English language arts, visual arts, and geography.

• A printed and hand-painted cotton skirt by Mexican fashion designer Ramón Valdiosera (1918–2017) from around 1950 combines a variety of traditional motifs to forge a new and easily recognizable symbol of Mexican national identity during a period of rapid modernization following the Mexican Revolution (1910–20). His designs appealed to both Mexicans and Americans at midcentury, especially Californians.

• *The San Miguel Side Chair* (designed 1947), which incorporates materials indigenous to Mexico, such as agave fiber and ayacahuite pine wood, also appealed to consumers on both sides of the California-Mexico border. Made by American and German furniture designers Michael van Beuren (1911–2004), Klaus Grabe (1910–2004), and Morley Webb (1909–1986), all of whom migrated to Mexico in the late 1930s, the chair recalls historic examples as well as the streamlined, minimal furniture popular among middle-class consumers worldwide in this period.

• Dora De Larios's mid-1960s stoneware sculpture *Warrior*, which borrows elements from both West Mexican and Japanese ceramic traditions, speaks to the artist's understanding of community and regional identities in Los Angeles, a city that she has described as "a convergence of so many cultures."

• *The Goez Map Guide to the Murals of East Los Angeles* (1975), a printed map created by the founders and collaborators of Goez Art Studios and Gallery, one of the first Chicano arts organization in East L.A., calls attention to Mexican-descent culture, history, and identity's important presence in L.A. The map's three creators—David Botello (b. 1946), "Don Juan" Johnny D. González (b. 1943), and Robert Arenivar (1931–1985)—intended for it to spark tourism to East L.A., the home of 271 murals at that time, and serve as a collectable item and tool for social justice.

Art and design shape the built environment, cross cultural and geographic borders, and serve as markers of constantly shifting ideas about self and community. Because of this, they are unique entry points to topics of personal, cultural, and historical significance for students. As you and your students explore the objects highlighted in these materials, consider the following questions together: How do art and design help define national and regional identities? How do they help shape the physical and social character of your school or neighborhood? How do artists learn, transform, or appropriate aesthetic motifs and technical processes to create objects that speak both to history and the contemporary moment? How does learning about the relationship between California and Mexico impact your personal understanding of cultural exchange, community, and identity?

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San Miguel or San Miguelito Side Chair (silla), designed 1947, manufactured 1947–60
Michael van Beuren, Klaus Grabe, Morley Webb

Born in New York, Michael van Beuren (1911–2004) traveled to Dessau, Germany, in 1931 to study architecture at the Bauhaus (1919–33), an art school established by German architect Walter Gropius. All students were required to undertake manual training in a craft (ceramics, cabinetmaking, metalwork, weaving, etc.) as well as drawing, painting, materials sciences, and art theory. The school also cultivated relationships with leaders in craft and industrial production, and encouraged students to take on professional commissions. Because the Nazis closed the school in 1933, van Beuren was unable to complete his degree and thereby could not officially practice as an architect. However, the Bauhaus ethos of combining expert technical craftsmanship and aesthetic knowledge with an understanding of business and industry had a strong impact on his approach to furniture design.

When he migrated to Mexico in 1938, van Beuren was thrust into a society whose political structure, economy, and cultural values were undergoing major transformations. After the period of armed conflict during the Mexican Revolution ceased in 1920, the country's leading politicians, artists, and intellectuals began the long process of creating a unified nation state with a common culture. They hoped that a clearly defined national culture would help heal regional disputes and inspire lasting peace. In the 1930s and 1940s, many people believed that Indigenous and folk art traditions ought to form the basis of postrevolutionary cultural expression (Luis Barragán, Frida Kahlo, and Diego Rivera are associated with this movement). Yet others felt it was important for a new, modern Mexico to adopt an international aesthetic and instead draw on styles created by European and American avant-gardes.

Van Beuren and his collaborators, Klaus Grabe (1910–2004) and Morley Webb (1909–1986), chose a middle path between tradition and novelty when they founded the furniture company Grabe & van Beuren in Mexico in 1938. The designers were drawn to local plant fibers like jute and agave, which were accessible, cost-effective, and familiar to consumers. They combined these materials, typically associated with rural traditions and inexpensive crafts, with minimal, organic silhouettes championed by the Bauhaus and other modern designers. The production of Grabe & van Beuren's designs involved both handwork and mechanized labor.

The *San Miguel or San Miguelito Side Chair (silla)*, designed in 1947 and manufactured until 1960, was one of Grabe & van Beuren's most popular pieces. The chair is based on Spanish and Mexican models dating back to the eighteenth century, known as *Campeche or Butaque/Butaca* chairs. Versions of the chair vary widely but most are low to the ground with curved wooden legs, a simple woven or leather seat, and an angled back that allows the sitter to stretch out. Historians believe that this chair form was especially popular in warm, humid, and tropical regions (such as Campeche, a Mexican state on the Yucatán Peninsula) because it wasn't upholstered (which attracts heat and bugs), yet still allowed the sitter to lounge comfortably.

The *San Miguel Side Chair* has a frame made of ayacahuite pine, which is native to southern Mexico and Central America. The chair's back and seat are formed by webbing consisting of woven strips of agave fiber, commonly called *ixtle*. The art of weaving *ixtle* is a lengthy process that involves extracting the fibers from the plant leaves, either by hand or with a machine, and then wetting and combing the fibers before spinning them into thread. When enough thread has been prepared, artists weave the threads on a loom. It is possible that Grabe & van Beuren either employed expert *ixtle* weavers in-house to make webbing for their furniture, or that they purchased the webbing wholesale from local producers.

Increased industrialization and significant economic growth in Mexico (known as the Mexican miracle) and the United States after World War II helped create strong middle classes that simultaneously celebrated new technologies and longed for handcrafted objects evocative of simpler times. Featured in exhibitions and trade shows in California and New York, and sold by numerous Mexican and American retailers, Grabe & van Beuren appealed to middle class consumers who sought to decorate their homes with affordable, high quality furnishings that embraced modern life, handcraft, and historical tradition.

Discussion Prompts

1. Thousands of people in Mexico and California purchased the *San Miguel Side Chair* for their homes in the second half of the twentieth century. What about the chair may have been appealing to them? Do you have a favorite chair? Why is it your favorite?

2. If you were to design a chair, what qualities would it have? What makes a chair comfortable or uncomfortable? Consider things like materials, texture, height, angle, size, and color as well as your favorite sitting position and your favorite activities to do when sitting in a chair. Sketch your chair design and share with a partner.

3. How did Grabe & van Beuren transform or appropriate aesthetic motifs and technical skills to create a chair that spoke to history as well as to the contemporary moment?

Michael van Beuren (United States, 1911–2004, active Mexico), Klaus Grabe (Germany, 1910–2004, active in Mexico and United States), Morley Webb (United States, 1909–1986, active Mexico), *San Miguel or San Miguelito Side Chair (silla)*, designed 1947, manufactured 1947–60, wood (pine/ayacahuite) and woven agave fiber (*ixtle*), 32 × 21 ¾ × 26 in. (81.28 × 55.25 × 66.04 cm); seat height: 15 in. (38.1 cm), purchased with funds provided by the Bernard and Edith Lewin Collection of Mexican Art Deaccession Fund (M.2015.42), photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

Artist unknown (New Orleans, Louisiana, United States), *Campeche Chair*, c. 1800–1810, mahogany and mahogany veneer, light and dark wood inlay, and leather, 39 × 26 ⅞ × 27 ½ in. (99.1 x 68.3 × 69.9 cm), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, gift of Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Williams, 2000 (2000.451)

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Skirt, c. 1950
Ramón Valdiosera, Maya de México

China Poblana (front), c. 1925
Unknown (Mexico)

Many people consider Ramón Valdiosera (1918–2017) the father of Mexican fashion design. Raised in the port city of Veracruz, Valdiosera was interested in illustration and storytelling from an early age, publishing his first comic at the age of seventeen. His love of illustration and his interest in Mexico's diverse cultural traditions led him to travel throughout the country during the 1940s making sketches of regional customs and styles of dress. He subsequently published illustrated books on a wide range of topics pertaining to Mexican cultural history, including traditional textiles and costumes, dances, folklore, and children's toys.

Passionate about cultivating greater international respect for Mexican culture, Valdiosera also began creating garments of his own design in this period that reflected a patchwork of Mexican textile traditions. His vision was in line with that of Miguel Alemán Valdés, who served as president of Mexico from 1946–52. Both men were deeply invested in defining and elevating a unified national cultural identity—often referred to as *Mexicanidad* (Mexicanness) in the period following the Mexican Revolution (1910–20)—and promoting increased exchange with the United States and other Western countries. With the support of Alemán, movie star Dolores del Río, and textile entrepreneur Enrique Holtschmit, Valdiosera founded the fashion line Maya de México in 1949 and debuted his first international collection in New York that same year, the first Mexican fashion designer ever to do so.

Drawing inspiration from the forms, patterns, and colors used in traditional Mexican clothing as well as from contemporary garments produced by European couturiers such as Christian Dior, Valdiosera/Maya de México created high-quality garments unlike anything the fashion world had ever seen. Rather than use textiles popular in the United States and Europe at the time, such as silk, sateen, and mohair, Valdiosera consciously selected traditional Mexican fabrics for his garments, including cotton, *ixtle* (plant fiber, typically yucca or agave), and cambaya fabric (a multicolored woven fabric that is often striped).

Embellished with plastic sequins and glass beads, Valdiosera/Maya de México's printed and hand-painted cotton skirt is a classic example of the designer's aesthetic. The skirt recalls the *china poblana* style of dress, rumored to have been introduced in seventeenth-century Puebla, Mexico by a young Asian woman known as *la china poblana* (the Chinese/Asian woman of Puebla). Worn primarily by women in rural areas of the country, the outfit of the *china poblana*—consisting of a full skirt adorned with sequins and beads, an embroidered blouse, and a long *rebozo* (shawl)—became increasingly popular in the late nineteenth century and especially after the Mexican Revolution (1910–20) as a symbol of national cultural identity.

While the skirt draws on elements of the *china poblana* outfit, it also echoes French fashion designer Christian Dior's New Look. Dior created waves when he debuted the New Look in 1947: the hourglass silhouette with its padded hips and long skirt represented a radical departure from the loose-fitting, liberal looks of the 1920s and 1930s. Valdiosera/Maya de México's skirt has a tightly fitted, high waist and its alternating black and patterned vertical stripes create the illusion of pleats and accentuate the garment's volume. The skirt's bold, swirling pattern was sourced from Jorge Enciso's 1947 *Sellos del Mexico Antiguo (Design Motifs of Ancient Mexico)*, a book of ornamental designs derived from the Aztec, Maya, Zapotec, Olmec, and other Indigenous Mexican cultures.

Shortly after his New York debut and with Dolores del Río's unflagging support, Valdiosera began dressing some of the most famous Mexican and American movie stars of the era, among them Maria Félix, Rita Hayworth, and Elizabeth Taylor. He also added to his seven Mexico-based shops, opening an eighth location in Beverly Hills in December of 1949. Circulating in Mexican and American press, television, films, and in the closets of women all over Mexico and the United States (especially in Southern California) throughout the second half of the twentieth century, Valdiosera's designs capture a specific moment in Mexico and California's dynamic relationship.

Discussion Prompts

1. Compare Valdiosera's skirt with the other outfit pictured here. What is similar about them and what is different?

2. Why do you think Valdiosera's designs might have appealed to women in Mexico as well as in the United States, and especially in Southern California?

3. What are a few of your favorite things to wear? Why? Do they represent an aspect of your personality or your culture?

Ramón Valdiosera, Maya de México, *Skirt*, c. 1950, printed and hand-painted cotton, plastic sequins, glass beads; center-back length: 31 in., collection of Leigh Wishner, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

Unknown (Mexico), *China Poblana* (front), c. 1925, blouse: cotton plain weave with bead and sequin embellishment; skirt: felted cotton plain weave, printed and with sequin embellishment; shawl (rebozo): rayon plain weave with ikat-dyed patterning; center back length: 24 3/4 inches (blouse), RISD Museum, Costume and Textiles Collection, gift of Barbara White Dailey (1996.84), photography by Erik Gould, courtesy of the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, Providence

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Warrior, mid-1960s
Dora De Larios

Standing Male Figure with Club, 200 BC–AD 500
Unknown

Haniwa: Tomb Sculpture of a Seated Noble, late Tumulus period, c. 500–600
Unknown

Born and raised in East Los Angeles, artist Dora De Larios (b. 1933) has produced handmade sculptures, large-scale public artworks, and functional ceramic wares for more than sixty years. Both of De Larios's parents migrated to the United States from Mexico; her mother moved from Durango with her own mother at the age of four and her father migrated from Mexico City as an adult in the early 1930s. De Larios says that the predominance of Mexican and Japanese culture in her childhood neighborhood had a strong impact on her. From a young age, annual family road trips to Mexico also ignited her creativity: the artist recalls being especially impressed by the vitality and spiritual strength of the Aztec Sun Stone at the National Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City as well as Maya, Aztec, and West Mexican clay and stone artworks representing animals, serpents, and deities.

De Larios first began experimenting with clay when she was a student at Dorsey High School in the early 1950s. She says she, "loved clay from the moment [she] touched the material," often staying at school until evening to make sculptures in the studio on campus. She went on to major in ceramics and minor in sculpture at the University of Southern California (USC). After college, De Larios traveled the world for thirteen months and continued to expand her understanding of art history, philosophy, and religion. The artist has said that during her travels, she "began to see the patterns and similarities between myths in the various cultures….There were different names for the deities, but they served the same purpose. They were positive or destructive forces."

Standing over two feet tall, De Larios's *Warrior* echoes clay tomb sculptures created in Nayarit, Mexico, nearly two thousand years ago, and Haniwa, hollow terracotta figures that were buried with the dead in early Japan. Artists from both cultures used handbuilding techniques to make their work. Handbuilding is an ancient pottery technique that involves creating pottery and sculpture using one's hands, fingers, and simple tools rather than a pottery wheel. Pinch pottery, coil building, and slab building are the most popular handbuilding techniques.

In her practice, De Larios employs both handbuilding and wheel throwing techniques. *Warrior* was likely made by combining numerous wheelthrown clay segments to create a human form, which the artist then decorated using carving tools, stamps, and colored glazes. Over the course of her career, De Larios has produced a large number of warrior figures in different media. After her mother died of cancer in 1969, the artist created a series of bronze warrior sculptures—one of them entitled *Fallen Warrior*—to help ease her grief.

De Larios's creative practice is steeped in her unique approach to multicultural iconography and spirituality as well as her deep understanding of ceramic art's global history. Attuned to clay's historical and technical possibilities, she draws inspiration from the city of Los Angeles, her family heritage, and personal experiences to create contemporary works that traverse borders.

Discussion Prompts

1. De Larios is influenced by both Mexican and Japanese sculpture traditions. What elements can you find in *Standing Male Figure with Club* and *Haniwa: Tomb Sculpture of a Seated Noble* that may have influenced the artist when she was creating *Warrior*? Do you think *Standing Male Figure with Club* and *Haniwa: Tomb Sculpture of a Seated Noble* represent warrior figures? Why or why not?

2. Can you think of other cultures around the world that honor warriors and/or warrior-like traits? How would you describe your personal vision of a warrior?

3. Look closely at De Larios's *Warrior*. What kinds of tools do you imagine she used to create the designs on the sculpture's surface?

Dora De Larios (United States, b. 1933), *Warrior*, mid-1960s, stoneware, 27 × 16 × 10 in., collection of the Gralnik Family, photo by Robert Wedemeyer, © Dora De Larios

Unknown, *Standing Male Figure with Club*, Nayarit, Mexico, 200 BC–AD 500, slip-painted ceramic, 21 ¾ × 9 ¼ × 8 ¼ in. (55.25 × 23.5 × 20.96 cm), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Constance McCormick Fearing (M.86.311.28), photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

Unknown, *Haniwa: Tomb Sculpture of a Seated Noble*, Japan, late Tumulus period, c. 500–600, sculpture, coil-built earthenware with applied decoration, 31 × 14 ⅜ × 15 in. (78.7 × 36.5 × 38.1 cm), Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Mr. and Mrs. Allan C. Balch Fund (M.58.9.4), photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

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The Goez Map Guide to the Murals of East Los Angeles, 1975
"Don Juan" Johnny D. González, David Botello, Robert Arenivar

First printed in 1975 by Goez Publishing Company, *The Goez Map Guide to the Murals of East Los Angeles* is a representation of East L.A. by artists "Don Juan" Johnny D. González (b. 1943), David Botello (b. 1946), and Robert Arenivar (1931–1985) that identifies 271 murals at 107 separate locations throughout the region. The map was published during the Chicano movement, which grew out of the broader civil rights movement that took place in the United States in the 1960s and 1970s. During this period, Chicanos—people of Mexican descent living in the U.S.—mobilized to demand social justice and equality. The movement's primary goals included restoration to Mexican Americans of the land gained by the U.S. as a result of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), rights for farm workers, and education reforms to revise Eurocentric curricula.

The roots of the Chicano movement in art extend back to the period following the Mexican Revolution (1910–20), when artists like Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco, and David Alfaro Siqueiros were commissioned to paint murals that glorified the revolution and expressed pride in Mexico's mixed Indigenous and Spanish heritage. Taking inspiration from the Mexican muralists, some of whom also painted murals in the United States, Chicano artists began painting large-scale murals throughout East Los Angeles in the 1960s and 1970s in order to critique racism and inequality, and affirm Mexican American cultural identity. Today, Chicano artists' murals continue to beautify neighborhoods, recount stories of injustice, and present visual accounts of Indigenous, modern Mexican, Californian, and Mexican American histories that are not always taught in schools or adequately represented in popular media.

In 1969, brothers Jose-Luis and "Don Juan" Johnny D. González, along with David Botello, founded Goez Art Studios and Gallery on East 1st Street in East L.A. The name "Goez" combines the first and last two letters of the brothers' surname. From 1969 until 1981, Goez was a collaborative, multipurpose company that represented more than 300 artists and functioned as an art studio, gallery, import business, fine-arts restoration studio, school, and cultural center. Above all, the founders and collaborators behind Goez promoted cultural pride, self-determination, art production and exhibition, and gainful employment for artists.

Goez also promoted local, regional, and international tourism to East L.A. by organizing bus tours of existing murals, encouraging local businessman to commission more murals, and creating printed souvenirs—postcards, calendars, posters, and maps—for tourists to buy. *The Goez Map* helped educate both locals and outsiders about Chicano history; it is an example of Goez's unique approach to tourism, which combined social activism and cultural education with commerce.

The map's iconography illustrates the fluidity and complexity of borders and Chicano identity. Surrounding the central map are two borders (a double meaning of the word 'border' may have been intended by the map's creators) that weave over and under each other. The narrow geometric border is decorated with *Xicalcoliuhqui*, a common Mesoamerican motif composed of three steps linked to a hook that means "twisted gourd" in Nahuatl, an Uto-Aztecan language primarily spoken in western and central Mexico. In contrast, the curvilinear border is derived from rinceau or arabesque patterns, which originated in Ancient Greece and the Ancient Near East before being adopted by Europeans. As equally visible elements of a whole, the map's borders subtly negate the idea of cultural and ethnic hierarchies, which was espoused by Europeans who migrated to the Americas beginning in 1492.

Other visual elements also reflect a mix of cultural and historical signifiers. The map's compass rose features the head of the Mesoamerican god Quetzalcoatl, an earth and water deity associated with the creation of mankind and often depicted as a feathered serpent. A banner to its right reads "Tierra por Libertad," ("Land for Liberty") a revision of the Mexican Revolutionary slogan, "Tierra y Libertad" ("Land and Liberty"). Drawings in each of the four corners depict scenes from early California history that demonstrate shared Spanish and Mexican primacy in the region. A functional map, educational tool, and artwork, *The Goez Map Guide to the Murals of East Los Angeles* affirms the importance of Chicano history and culture in Los Angeles.

Discussion Prompts

1. A form of public art, murals offer an alternative to private galleries and museums. Have you ever seen a mural or other public artwork? What is different about viewing public art versus art in a gallery or museum?

2. Artist "Don Juan" Johnny D. González coined the phrase, "In Europe all roads lead to Rome. In Southern California all freeways lead to East Los Angeles," which appears on *The Goez Map's* upper right corner. How do you interpret this phrase? Study the map's other imagery—what does each element communicate about the relationships between Europe, Mexico, California, and the United States?

3. What are all of the things that you associate with the word 'border'? With your class, create a word list or web. Can you identify some of the sources of your associations i.e. do they come from personal experience, the news, books, etc.?

Created and designed by "Don Juan" Johnny D. González, design and drawing by David Botello, story illustrations by Robert Arenivar, *The Goez Map Guide to the Murals of East Los Angeles*, 1975, offset lithograph printed by Goez Publishing Company, 17 ½ × 23 ⅝ in., © 1975 "Don Juan" Johnny D. González and David Botello