

Exhibition: *Mixpantli: Space, Time, and the Indigenous Origins of Mexico*

On View: December 12, 2021–May 1, 2022

Location: Resnick Pavilion



(Image captions on page 3)

(Los Angeles—September 16, 2021) The Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) presents *Mixpantli: Space, Time, and the Indigenous Origins of Mexico*, coinciding with the 500th anniversary of the fall of the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan (modern-day Mexico City). This exhibition subverts the traditional narrative of the conquest by centering the creative resilience of Indigenous artists, mapmakers, and storytellers who forged new futures and made their world anew through artistic practice. Nahua scribes and painters gave the name *mixpantli*, or “banner of clouds,” to the first omen of the conquest, depicting this omen as both a Mexica, or Aztec, battle standard and a Euro-Christian column enveloped in clouds. *Mixpantli*, then, reflects the bringing together of both Nahua and Christian worldviews, and the efforts of Indigenous peoples to reorient space and time in a new world and era.

Featuring more than 30 works, *Mixpantli* is co-curated by Diana Magaloni, Deputy Director and Dr. Virginia Fields Curator of the Art of the Ancient Americas at LACMA, and Alyce de Carteret, Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow of the Art of the Ancient Americas at LACMA. “This exhibition creates an opportunity to re-examine traditional narratives of ‘conquest’, focusing instead on Indigenous Nahua artists and knowledge-keepers who tell a different story,” says Magaloni. “The show puts pre-Columbian and early colonial works in conversation to showcase the creative resilience of Nahua artists under Spanish rule and the centrality of Nahua worldview in shaping modern Mexico.”

Unique to the exhibition is a facsimile set of 16th- and 17th-century maps, originally crafted by Indigenous cartographers and reproduced for LACMA by Mexico City-based artist Tlaoli Ramírez Téllez. The original documents, housed in Mexico’s national archive and known as *mapas de merced*, were made to accompany legal petitions against royal land grants, documenting the long-standing relationships that Indigenous communities had with their lands. Due to their fragile nature, the maps

cannot travel, and the facsimiles will allow the documents to be displayed in an art museum for the first time. “We are so excited to be able to share these maps, giving visitors a unique opportunity to appreciate Indigenous cartography as a lasting art form, as an irreplaceable historical archive, and as a potent form of political resistance,” said Alyce de Carteret.

Mixpantli: Space, Time, and the Indigenous Origins of Mexico is joined by the companion exhibition *Mixpantli: Contemporary Echoes* (December 12, 2021–June 12, 2022), which showcases the lasting impact of Indigenous creative resilience and vibrant artistic traditions in contemporary Los Angeles and Mexico.

About the Exhibition

The exhibition comprises more than 30 works, the majority of which are works on paper, and introduces key themes that contextualize the early colonial history of Mexico, or New Spain, including the death of Moctezuma and the central role of the *tlatoani* (Mexica ruler) in Nahua worldview; the recreation of space-time and Mesoamerican cosmic order; the “conquest” as a new era; and the purposeful intertwining of Mesoamerican and Euro-Christian worldviews in Indigenous art and practice in this new era.

Early colonial documents reveal how, for elite Nahuas, Moctezuma became a central figure in uniting Mesoamerican and Euro-Christian cosmologies. In this section of the exhibition, a facsimile of the *Codex Moctezuma* chronicles the final years of the Aztec Empire where a captive Moctezuma is forced to speak before his people. He lies mortally wounded, dispossessed of his regalia. The betrayal and assassination of Moctezuma by the Spanish evoked the Passion of Christ, and *tlacuiloque*, or Nahua artists, drew on imagery like that of Albrecht Dürer’s *Ecce Homo* (1512) to illustrate a Christ-like Moctezuma in his final days. Mexica nobility, who continued to assert their political power through connection to Moctezuma’s lineage, also created visual connections between Moctezuma and Jesus, a new solar deity in Nahua worldview.

Another key section in the show explores the Mesoamerican concept of space-time and cosmic creation. In Mesoamerican worldview, the cosmos have been created, destroyed, and remade in cyclical fashion. The destruction of an era meant the sky would collapse upon the earth, and reordering cosmic space-time required divine sacrifice. To lift the sky, deities would raise a world tree at the four corners of the cosmos and its center, a five-directional order held sacred across Mesoamerica. These trees would once again sustain the three levels of the cosmos: the celestial, earthly, and watery realms. Finally, a new sun, chosen through divine trial, would take his place in the skies, propelling time forward with his daily journey through the sky and his nightly journey through the primordial sea. The section features four works: an Olmec jade tablet, a Mixtec codex-style vase, an Aztec carved relief, and an early colonial chalice cover, which attest to the fundamental nature of this cosmic arrangement for numerous Mesoamerican societies dating back millennia.

Like mirrors, maps are instruments of seeing, making visible the histories of a people on their lands. In the 16th and 17th centuries, Indigenous artists produced maps to accompany legal petitions against royal land grants that documented the long-standing relationships that Indigenous communities had with their lands. This section presents contemporary artist facsimiles of the original maps, known as *mapas de merced*. Nahua artists drew on centuries of Indigenous cartographic, narrative, and artistic traditions to make Indigenous lands, histories, and relations legible to colonial courts. By becoming fluent in two distinct visual traditions, artists resisted the colonial appropriation of lands and subverted Spanish authority, creating mirrors of their own antiquity.

Credit

This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

Generous support for LACMA's Art of the Ancient Americas department is provided by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and Gregory Annenberg Weingarten, GRoW @ Annenberg.

All exhibitions at LACMA are underwritten by the LACMA Exhibition Fund. Major annual support is provided by Meredith and David Kaplan, with generous annual funding from Kevin J. Chen, Louise and Brad Edgerton, Edgerton Foundation, Emily and Teddy Greenspan, Marilyn B. and Calvin B. Gross, Mary and Daniel James, Kelsey Lee Offield, Lenore and Richard Wayne, and Marietta Wu and Thomas Yamamoto.

About LACMA

Located on the Pacific Rim, LACMA is the largest art museum in the western United States, with a collection of more than 147,000 objects that illuminate 6,000 years of artistic expression across the globe. Committed to showcasing a multitude of art histories, LACMA exhibits and interprets works of art from new and unexpected points of view that are informed by the region's rich cultural heritage and diverse population. LACMA's spirit of experimentation is reflected in its work with artists, technologists, and thought leaders as well as in its regional, national, and global partnerships to share collections and programs, create pioneering initiatives, and engage new audiences.

Location: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard, Los Angeles, CA 90036. lacma.org

Image captions: Left: *Corregidor Pedro Pérez de Zamora*, Facsimile of Map of Zolipa Misantla, Veracruz, 1573, 2021 facsimile of the original in the collection of the Archivo General de la Nación by Tlaoli Ramírez Téllez, courtesy of the artist, commissioned by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, © Tlaoli Ramírez Téllez; Center: *Facsimile of genealogy of the House of Moctezuma*, 1791, 2021 facsimile of the original in the collection of the Archivo General de la Nación by Tlaoli Ramírez Téllez, courtesy of the artist, commissioned by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, © Tlaoli Ramírez Téllez; Right: *Mirror*, 1325–1521, Aztec, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, gift of Constance McCormick Fearing, photo © Museum Associates/LACMA

Press Contact

Erin Yokomizo | Senior Associate, Communications | eyokomizo@lacma.org | 323 932-5825

Connect with LACMA



@lacma