

LACMA FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

EXHIBITION: CHILDREN OF THE PLUMED SERPENT: THE LEGACY OF QUETZALCOATL IN ANCIENT MEXICO

ON VIEW: APRIL 1-JULY 1, 2012

LOCATION: RESNICK PAVILION

LACMA PRESENTS GROUNDBREAKING CULTURAL INVESTIGATION OF THE LEGEND OF QUETZALCOATL IN SOUTHERN MEXICO

EXHIBITION FEATURES 200 RARE ARTWORKS FROM THE UNITED STATES, MEXICO, AND EUROPE



(IMAGE CAPTIONS ON PAGE 6)

(Los Angeles, March 16, 2012)— The Los Angeles County Museum of Art presents *Children of the Plumed Serpent: The Legacy of Quetzalcoatl in Ancient Mexico*, the first large-scale exploration of the ancient kingdoms of southern Mexico and their patron deity, Quetzalcoatl, the human incarnation of the Plumed Serpent. On view from April 1 through July 1, 2012, this groundbreaking exhibition features more than two hundred objects—including painted codices, turquoise mosaics, gold, and textiles—from Mexico, Europe, and the United States. These rare artworks trace the development of an extensive trade network that resulted in a period of cultural innovation that spread across ancient Mexico, the American Southwest, and Central America during the Postclassic (AD 900-1521) and early colonial periods.

"This exhibition foregrounds an era of cultural innovation in Mesoamerica when trade networks, closely linked to the deity Quetzalcoatl, facilitated the exchange of both goods and ideas across vast distances," said Victoria Lyall, LACMA associate curator of Latin American art, "Southern Mexican kingdoms recognized Quetzalcoatl as their founder and patron, and these communities became, and continue to be, the Children of the Plumed Serpent."

The exhibition is co-curated by LACMA curators the late Dr. Virginia Fields and Dr. Victoria Lyall, together with guest curator Dr. John Pohl, Adjunct Professor, Department of Art History at UCLA. After its staging in Los Angeles, the exhibition will travel to the Dallas Museum of Art where it will be on view from July 29 through November 25, 2012.

Exhibition Background

This exhibition follows the historical trajectory of Quetzalcoatl's life and explores his role as founder and benefactor of the Nahua-, Mixtec-, and Zapotec-dominated kingdoms of southern Mexico. Legendary accounts provide key insights into the sophistication and complexity of Postclassic-period societies in Mexico. According to legend, Tollan was founded by Quetzalcoatl, an incarnation of the ancient spirit force of wind and rain that combined the attributes of a serpent with those of the quetzal bird. The Toltec people prospered at Tollan by engaging in long distance commerce until Quetzalcoatl's rivals schemed against him. Exiled from Tula he traveled east, and the civil strife that ensued led to Tollan's destruction.

The communities of southern Mexico came to power after the fall of Tula and embraced the deity as their founder and benefactor. Organized into a loose confederacy of royal families, these southern kingdoms developed a highly sophisticated mode of visual communication that was remarkably effective in transcending linguistic and ethnic differences. For three hundred years the Children of the Plumed Serpent remained the dominant cultural, political, and economic force throughout southern Mexico, until a rival emerged in the Basin of Mexico, the Aztec Empire of the Triple Alliance. These kingdoms, however, successfully resisted Aztec and later Spanish control.

Exhibition Organization

The exhibition is organized into five thematic sections, which are arranged chronologically. The first section, *The World of Tula and Chichen Itza*, explores the nascent trade networks originating from Tula in central Mexico and Chichen Itza on the Yucatan peninsula. Devoted to the Plumed Serpent, these two centers attracted visitors from across the Americas and dominated the Mesoamerican political landscape between AD 900 and 1200. Imported goods such as ceramic vessels and gold from Central America, along with turquoise from the American Southwest, speak to the growing market for exotic materials developing around the devotion to Quetzalcoatl.

The second section, *The New Tollan: The Emergence of Cholula and the Birth of the International Style*, examines the rise of Cholula—after AD 1200—as a center of religious authority and commerce in the Americas. By the fourteenth century, an international art style—characterized by its vivid palette and the use of bold symbols and simple icons—facilitated the exchange of ideas across ethnic and linguistic boundaries.

The third section, *Feasting, Divination, and Heroic History*, examines the ritual life of the Children of the Plumed Serpent. Feasting rituals played a vital role in regional politics, providing occasions for noble families to foment alliances and exchange rare gifts. Festivities included dancing, drinking, and the recitation of poetry. Revelers drank pulque (a beverage made from fermented agave) from finely painted goblets and poets recited the heroic exploits of cultural heroes as depicted by the painted codices.

The fourth section of the exhibition, *Avenues of Trade and the Spread of the International Style*, highlights the type of luxury goods that moved along the trade corridors. Royal houses through southern Mexico sought after power and rank by means of gift exchanges and wedding dowries, which ultimately resulted in fierce competitions for luxury goods. The International Style was widely adopted across Mesoamerica and ultimately united the disparate corners of the region. From the Yucatan peninsula to the vast reaches of Northern Mexico and the American Southeast, exotic materials such as shell and turquoise were exchanged for other elite commodities such as cacao and rare feathers.

The final section of the exhibition, *The Aztec Conquest and the Spanish Incursion*, examines the strategies employed by southern Mexican kingdoms in the face of new threats to their political and cultural landscape. By the fifteenth century, the Aztec Empire asserted its dominance over great swaths of Mesoamerica. The arrival of Hernán Cortés and his army in 1519 ended further conquest. Under the Spanish regime, the southern kingdoms reconstituted their confederacies and trading networks and emerged as an integral part of the new economy. Today, descendants of the Children of the Plumed Serpent continue to thrive in southern Mexico.

Publication

The accompanying catalogue features exciting new research and groundbreaking analysis by more than fifteen leading scholars, archaeologists, and curators, including Virginia Fields (1952-2011) LACMA senior curator and co-department head of Latin American art, John M.D.Pohl, and Victoria Lyall.

Related Public Programming

Lecture: The Children of the Plumed Serpent—Art and Ritual in Mexico's Late Antiquity

Saturday, April 14 | 2 pm, Brown Auditorium

Free, no reservations

Dr. John Pohl co-curator of the exhibition *Children of the Plumed Serpent: The Legacy of Quetzalcoatl in Ancient Mexico* will present his latest research on the Nahuatl, Mixtec, and Zapotec civilizations of southern Mexico—the Children of the Plumed Serpent, as they called themselves—and show that while the fall of the Aztecs in 1521 heralded the end of civilization, it signaled the rise of another whose legacy continued throughout the colonial period and persists to the present day.

Evenings for Educators

Ancient Mexico: The Legacy of the Plumed Serpent

Tuesday, April 17, 2012 | 4:30-8:30 pm

Tickets are \$15. To purchase tickets call 323 857-6010.

Learn more about the hero figure Quetzalcoatl and his significance in twelfth- to fifteenth-century Mexican history and artistic production. Examine the frescoes, codices, ceramics, gold, turquoise, shell, textiles, and feather work that define this period of trade.

Panel Discussion: Turquoise Mosaics

Monday, May 21, 2012 | 6 pm, Bing Theater

This panel discussion, held in conjunction with the exhibition "Children of the Plumed Serpent: The Legacy of Quetzalcoatl in Ancient Mexico," explores the significance of turquoise as a prized material and its relationship to the communities of central and southern Mexico. The material has been the focus of several investigations in both the United States and in Mexico. Scholars will discuss recent findings regarding the available sources of turquoise, the development of the trade into and out of Mexico and the technologies required to work the material.

Lecture

The History of Guelagueta and Community Cooperation amongst the Zapotec of the Oaxacan Central Valley

Sunday, June 10, 2012 | 2 pm, Bing Theater

Historian Xochitl Flores-Marcial explores the Zapotec tradition of Guelagueta, one of several Mesoamerican indigenous systems of reciprocal gift exchange. This important custom has been used by Zapotecs of the Oaxacan Central Valley in distributing resources since pre-Columbian times to present day. In speaking about an internal indigenous system, Guelagueta has proven to be valuable in reinforcing individual social responsibility that ultimately benefits the community as a whole.

Credit

This exhibition was organized by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and made possible by the National Endowment for the Humanities. It was supported in part by the National Endowment for the Arts, the Ethnic Arts Council of Los Angeles, and by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.



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The organizers are grateful for the special collaboration of the National Council for Culture and the Arts (CONACULTA), Mexico, and the National Institute for Anthropology and History (INAH), Mexico.



About LACMA

Since its inception in 1965, LACMA has been devoted to collecting works of art that span both history and geography and represent Los Angeles's uniquely diverse population. Today, the museum features particularly strong collections of Asian, Latin American, European, and American art, as well as a contemporary museum on its campus. With this expanded space for contemporary art, innovative collaborations with artists, and an ongoing *Transformation* project, LACMA is creating a truly modern lens through which to view its rich encyclopedic collection.

Location and Contact: 5905 Wilshire Boulevard (at Fairfax Avenue), Los Angeles, CA, 90036 | 323 857-6000 | lacma.org

Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Thursday: noon-8 pm; Friday: noon-9 pm; Saturday, Sunday: 11 am-8 pm; closed Wednesday

General Admission: Adults: \$15; students 18+ with ID and senior citizens 62+: \$10
Free General Admission: Members; children 17 and under; after 5 pm weekdays for L.A. County residents; second Tuesday of every month; Target Free Holiday Mondays

Image captions:

(Left) *Vessel*, Mexico, Oaxaca, AD 1350-1500, purchased with funds provided by Camilla Chandler Frost, Photo © 2012 Museum Associates/LACMA

(Second from left) *Rain-god Vessel*, Mexico, Colima, El Chanal, AD 1200-1500, Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, photo © Kimbell Museum/Art Resource, NY

(Second from right) *Xantil*, Mexico, AD 1200-1521, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin: Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Ethnologisches Museum, photo © Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Ethnologisches Museum (IV Ca 10855), Berlin, Germany, by Ines Seibt/BPK, Berlin/Art Resource, NY

(Right) *Turquoise-mosaic Shield*, Mexico, Puebla, AD 1100-1521, National Museum of the American Indian, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.

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