
CONTENT AREA 5

Indigenous Americas

1000 B.C.E.–1980 C.E.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 5-1. *Art of the Indigenous Americas is among the world's oldest artistic traditions. While its roots lie in northern Asia, it developed independently between c. 10,000 B.C.E. and 1492 C.E., which marked the beginning of the European invasions. Regions and cultures are referred to as the Indigenous Americas to signal the priority of First Nations cultural traditions over those of the colonizing and migrant peoples that have progressively taken over the American continents for the last 500 years.*

- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-1a.** Art of the Indigenous Americas is categorized by geography and chronology into the designations of Ancient America and Native North America. “Ancient America” is the category used for art created before 1550 C.E., south of the current U.S.–Mexico border. This region is traditionally divided into three main areas of culture: Mesoamerica, Central America*, and Andean South America. “Native North America” denotes traditionally oriented cultures north of the U.S.–Mexico border from ancient times to the present, with an emphasis on 1492 C.E. to today. Native North America has many regional subunits, such as the Northwest Coast, Southwest, Plains, and Eastern Woodlands.
- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-1b.** Artistic traditions of the indigenous Americas exhibit overarching traits: content that emphasizes unity with the natural world and a five-direction (North, South, East, West, Center) cosmic geometry; spirituality based in visionary shamanism; high value placed on animal-based media, such as featherwork, bone carving, and hide painting; incorporation of trade materials (e.g., greenstones such as turquoise and jadeite, shells such as the spiny oyster, and in the case of Native North America, imported beads, machine-made cloth, and glazes); stylistic focus on the essence rather than the appearance of subjects; and creation of aesthetic objects that have a strong functional aspect, reference, or utility (e.g., vessels, grinding platforms, and pipes). What is called “art” is considered to have, contain, and/or transfer life force rather than simply represent an image. Likewise, art is considered participatory and active, rather than simply made for passive viewing.

* An asterisk denotes content that will not be directly assessed on the AP Art History Exam.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 5-2. *Ancient Mesoamerica encompassed what is now Mexico (from Mexico City southward), Guatemala, Belize, and western Honduras, from 15,000 B.C.E. to 1521 C.E., which was the time of the Mexica (Aztec) downfall. General cultural similarities of ancient Mesoamerica include similar calendars, pyramidal stepped structures, sites and buildings oriented in relation to sacred mountains and celestial phenomena, and highly valued green materials, such as jadeite and quetzal feathers.*

- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-2a.** Three major distinct cultures and styles of Ancient Mesoamerica (Middle America) were the Olmec, Maya, and Mexica (aka Aztec — the empire was dominated by the Mexica ethnic group). The Olmec existed during the first millennium B.C.E., primarily in the Gulf Coast; the Mayan culture peaked during the first millennium C.E. in eastern Mesoamerica (the Yucatan Peninsula, Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras); and the Mexica existed from 1428 to 1521 C.E. in the region of central Mexico, though subordinating most of Mesoamerica. (Other important cultures include Teotihuacan, Toltec, West Mexican, Mixtec, and Zapotec.)* Styles from the various Mesoamerican cultures differed markedly. Mesoamerican pyramids began as early earthworks, changed to nine-level structures with single temples, and then later became structures with twin temples. Sacred sites were renovated and enlarged repeatedly over the centuries, resulting in acropoli and massive temples. Architecture was mainly stone post-and-lintel, often faced with relief sculpture and painted bright colors, emphasizing large masses that sculpt outdoor space. Plazas were typical for large ritual gatherings. Elaborate burials and other underground installations to honor the role of the Underworld were also found.
- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-2b.** Mesoamerican sculptural and two-dimensional art tended toward the figural, particularly in glorification of specific rulers. Mythical events were also depicted in a realistic, figural mode. Despite the naturalistic styles and anthropomorphic interpretations of subject matter, shamanic transformation, visions, and depiction of other cosmic realms figure prominently in Mesoamerican art. Art was produced primarily in workshops, but certain individual artists' styles have been identified (particularly in Maya), and some works of art were signed. Artists were typically elite specialists and, among the Maya, the second sons of royalty. Rulers were the major, but not the only, patrons. Audiences were both large, for calendrical rituals in plazas, and small, for gatherings of priests and nobles inside small temples atop pyramids. Some audiences were supernatural, as for the elaborate graves considered to be located in the Underworld.
- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-2c.** Mesoamerica has had an influence on its invaders and the world at large since the 16th century. Mesoamerica is the origin of many of the world's staple foods: chocolate, vanilla, tomatoes, avocados, and maize (corn). Mesoamericans discovered rubber, invented the first ballgame, and included a number of matrilinear and matriarchal cultures (promoting women's power). Recognition of the importance of this area in world history and art has lagged, but it increases as inclusiveness and multiculturalism grow in scholarship and popular consciousness. Indigenous culture continues: over seven million people speak Mayan languages today, and over one million speak Nahuatl, the Aztec language.

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- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-2d.** When Mexico was first discovered by Europe, gifts of Mexica art sent to Charles V alerted such artists as Albrecht Dürer to the unfamiliar but impressive media and images from the New World. Colonial artists preserved certain pre-Hispanic traditions both overtly and covertly in their art. After independence from Spain (in the early 19th century), the Aztec were claimed in nationalistic causes and national museums were created to promote ancient art. Twentieth-century muralists, such as Diego Rivera, overtly incorporated themes from the Mexica past. Twentieth-century European and American artists, such as Henry Moore* and Frank Lloyd Wright, were strongly influenced by the sculpture and architecture of ancient Mesoamerica as well.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 5-3. *The ancient Central Andes comprised present-day southern Ecuador, Peru, western Bolivia, and northern Chile. General cultural similarities across the Andes include an emphasis on surviving and interacting with the challenging environments, reciprocity and cyclicity (rather than individualism), and reverence for the animal and plant worlds as part of the practice of shamanistic religion.*

- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-3a.** As with ancient Mesoamerica, the Central Andes was a seat of culture and art parallel to the “Old” World in antiquity, diversity, and sophistication. Baskets from this region have been found dating to as early as 8800 B.C.E., proving early peopling from Asia through the rest of the Americas was accomplished by Neolithic times. Chavín and Inka were representative and distinct early and late cultures/styles respectively (Chavín: c. 1200–500 B.C.E. in the northern highlands with reach to the southern coast; Inka: 1438–1534 C.E. covering the entire Central Andes), although many other important, art-producing cultures existed between them. Similarities within Central Andean cultures can be traced to the influence of three significantly distinct ecosystems in close proximity: the dominant Andes mountains, a narrow desert coast, and the planet’s largest rain forest, the Amazon. These environments necessarily play a central role in art, influencing the materials (especially the prominence of camelid fiber and cotton textiles), political systems (coastal diversity, highland impulses toward unification), and overall values such as reciprocity, asymmetrical dualism, and travel across long distances.
- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-3b.** The necessity to interact with three disparate environments (mountains, desert coast, and rainforest) in order to survive instilled in Andean culture and art an underlying emphasis on trade in exotic materials. Complex ties linked coast with highlands; these connections brought forth themes of reciprocity, interdependence, contrast, asymmetry, and dualism. Accordingly, most Andean art seems to have been made by collaborative groups — the best known being the Inka high-status *accha* weavers (the empire’s most talented women weavers, kept cloistered). A hierarchy of materials was based on availability and/or requirement for collaboration to manipulate the materials. Featherwork, textiles, and greenstone were at the top of the materials hierarchy; metalwork, bone, obsidian, and stone toward the middle; and ceramics and wood at the lower end of the hierarchy. Textiles were a primary medium and were extraordinarily well preserved on the desert coast, fulfilling key practical and artistic functions in the various environmental zones.

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- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-3c.** Andean art tends to explore the terrestrial (e.g., animal and plant imagery, mountain veneration, sculpting of nature itself, and organic integration of architecture with the environment). It also concerns the nonterrestrial via abstraction and orientation toward the afterlife and the other realms of the cosmos. Peoples of the Andes practiced the world's earliest and most persistent artificial mummification (in many forms, from 5500 B.C.E. onward), and almost all art became grave goods for use in the afterlife. Shamanic visionary experience was a strong theme, especially featuring humans transforming into animal selves.
- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-3d.** The European invasions prevailed beginning in 1534 C.E.; however, indigenous descendants of ancient peoples remain: 8 to 10 million people still speak Quechua, the Inka language. Being more distant geographically and aesthetically, Andean art was less well known to early modern Europe and current society than Mesoamerican art. However, some key modern Euro–American artists, such as Paul Gauguin, Josef and Anni Albers*, and Paul Klee*, found inspiration in ancient Peruvian textiles and ceramics. Modern Latin American artists, such as Joaquín Torres García of Uruguay*, blended Inka art and architecture with modernist theory and style, exploring a common abstract vocabulary.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 5-4. *Despite underlying similarities, there are key differences between the art of Ancient America and Native North America with respect to its dating, environment, cultural continuity from antiquity to the present, and sources of information. Colonization by different European groups (Catholic and Protestant) undergirds distinct modern political situations for Amerindian survivors. Persecution, genocide, and marginalization have shaped current identity and artistic expression.*

- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-4a.** Archaeological excavation of works of art, monuments, and cities/sites predating European invasion serves as the mainstay for reconstructing the art and culture of ancient America, although the majority of surviving artworks were not scientifically extracted. Spanish chronicles by invaders, friars, and colonists provide some information about monuments and artistic practices of the last independent indigenous peoples, such as the Inka, Mexica (known as Aztecs), and Puebloans; these sources can be cautiously applied to earlier cultures' basic values and approaches. Hieroglyphs of the Mayas and Mexica illuminate text and image, historical, and artistic elements for those cultures. Ethnographic analogy highlights basic cultural continuities so that present traditional practices, myths, and religious beliefs may illuminate past artistic materials, creative processes, and iconography. Other disciplines, such as astronomy, botany, and zoology, help identify siting of cities and monuments, as well as native flora and fauna subject matter. Like all art historical research, work in these areas uses iconographic and formal analyses of large numbers of artworks and increasingly employs multidisciplinary collaboration.

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- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-4b.** Sources of information for Native North American art include archaeological excavations for precontact and colonial cultures, written ethnohistoric documents, tribal history (oral and written), modern artists' accounts and interviews, and museum records. Colonial and modern mistreatment of American Indians means that historical information sources may be highly contested by American Indians. Divergent stories depend on whether native or white sources are used. Sometimes the stories converge in a positive way, as in Maria and Julian Martínez' revival of ancient black-in-black ceramic techniques, which was encouraged by anthropologists.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING 5-5. *Although disease and genocide practiced by the European invaders and colonists reduced their population by as much as 90 percent, Native Americans today maintain their cultural identity and uphold modern versions of ancient traditions in addition to creating new art forms as part of the globalized contemporary art world.*

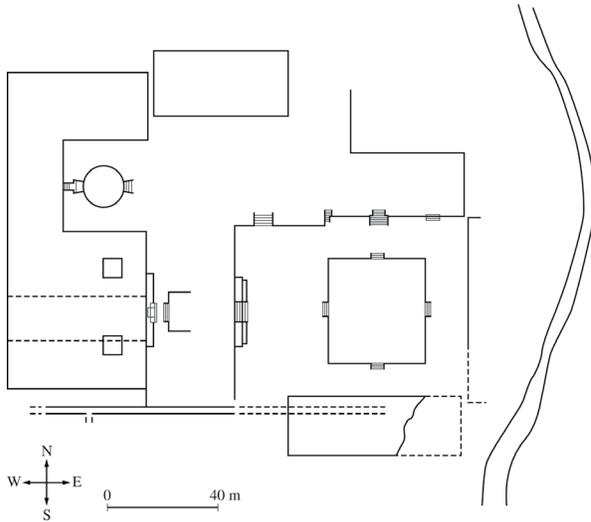
- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-5a.** *Indians, Native Americans, North American Indians* (in the United States), and *First Nations* (in Canada) are nonindigenous terms for the indigenous peoples inhabiting areas north of what is now the U.S.–Mexico border, from ancient times to the present. They did not have a collective name for themselves, being many different tribes and nations.
- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-5b.** Native American art media include earthworks, stone and adobe architecture, wood and bone carving, weaving and basketry, hide painting, ceramics, quillwork and beadwork, and, recently, painting on canvas and other European-style media. Many Native American artworks are ritual objects to wear, carry, or use during special ceremonies in front of large audiences. Functionality of the object is preferred; the more active a work of art, the more it is believed to contain and transfer life force and power. Centuries of interaction with colonial and migrant peoples means that some imported materials (e.g., glass beads, machine-made cloth, and ribbon) are now considered traditional. Likewise, in subject matter, the Spanish-introduced horse has become a cultural and artistic staple, alongside the indigenous buffalo, raven, and bear. European influence is inevitable but may be subtle. What is considered traditional is constantly changing; there is no singular, timeless, authentic Native American art or practice.
- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-5c.** Different regions of Native America have broadly similar styles of art, allowing grouping into Arctic*, Northwest Coast, Southwest, Plains, and Eastern Woodlands, among others. Geometric patterning, figures (often mythic or shamanic), and animals (e.g., snakes, birds, bison, and horses) are often seen. The various Native American groups may be seen to share larger ideas of harmony with nature, oneness with animals, respect for elders, community cohesion, dream guidance, shamanic leadership, and participation in large rituals (such as potlatches and sun dances). Postcontact art not only reflects these long-standing values, but it is also concerned with the history of conflict within tribes and between indigenous people and the U.S. and Canadian governments.

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- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-5d.** Intellectual pursuits apparent in artistic expressions include astronomical observation; poetry, song, and dance; and medicine (curing and divining). Artistic practices included workshops, apprentice–master relationships, and, less often, solitary art making. Some specialization by gender (e.g., women weaving, men carving) can be seen. Patrons might be the tribal leaders, an elder, or a family member. Audiences mostly were the entire group, though some objects and performances were restricted by their sacred or political nature.
- ▶ **Essential Knowledge 5-5e.** Due to the history of suppression and forced assimilation into white culture, influence of Native North American art on modern U.S. and European art styles has been minimized. However, recent cultural revitalization of traditions and active contemporary artistic production by self-taught and academically trained artists keep Native American participation in global artistry alive. Strains range from self-conscious revival of ancient arts, such as in Puebloan pottery, to cutting political commentary on racism and injustice.

Image Set

153. Chavín de Huántar. Northern highlands, Peru. Chavín. 900–200 B.C.E. Stone (architectural complex); granite (Lanzón and sculpture); hammered gold alloy (jewelry). (4 images)



Chavín de Huántar plan



Lanzón Stela

© Richard List/Corbis



Relief sculpture

© Charles & Josette Lenars/Corbis



Nose ornament

Photograph © The Cleveland Museum of Art

154. Mesa Verde cliff dwellings. Montezuma County, Colorado. Ancestral Puebloan (Anasazi). 450–1300 C.E. Sandstone.



Mesa Verde cliff dwellings

© Kerrick James/Corbis

155. Yaxchilán. Chiapas, Mexico. Maya. 725 C.E. Limestone (architectural complex).
(3 images)



Structure 40

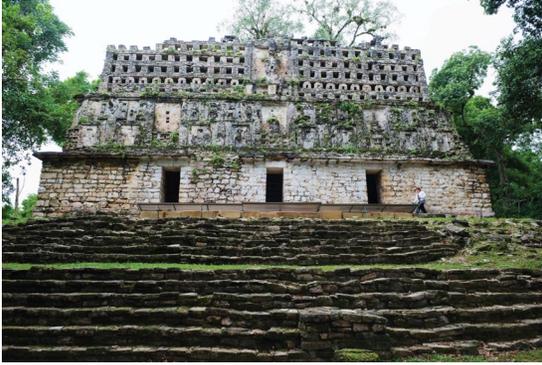
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Lintel 25, Structure 23

© Werner Forman/Art Resource, NY

Yaxchilán, continued



Structure 33

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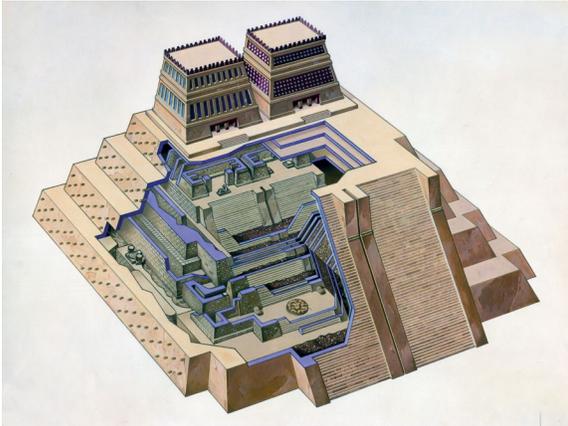
156. Great Serpent Mound. Adams County, southern Ohio. Mississippian (Eastern Woodlands). c. 1070 C.E. Earthwork/effigy mound.



Great Serpent Mound

© Richard A. Cooke/Corbis

157. Templo Mayor (Main Temple). Tenochtitlan (modern Mexico City, Mexico). Mexica (Aztec). 1375–1520 C.E. Stone (temple); volcanic stone (The Coyolxauhqui Stone); jadeite (Olmec-style mask); basalt (Calendar Stone). (4 images)



Templo Mayor (reconstruction drawing)

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The Coyolxauhqui Stone

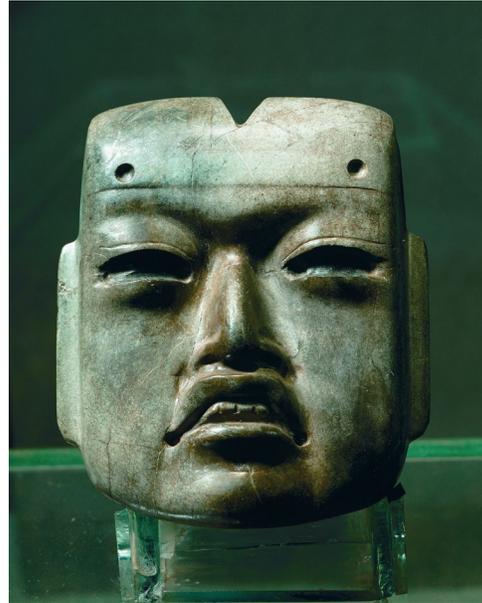
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Templo Mayor (Main Temple), *continued*



Calendar Stone

© AZA/Archive Zabé/Art Resource, NY



Olmec-style mask

© Gianni Dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY

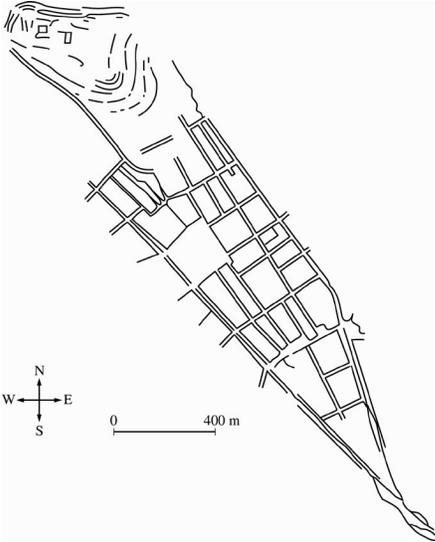
158. Ruler's feather headdress (probably of Motecuhzoma II). Mexica (Aztec). 1428–1520 C.E. Feathers (quetzal and cotinga) and gold.



Ruler's feather headdress

© Gianni Dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY

159. City of Cusco, including Oorikancha (Inka main temple), Santo Domingo (Spanish colonial convent), and Walls at Saqsa Waman (Sacsayhuaman). Central highlands, Peru. Inka. c. 1440 C.E.; convent added 1550–1650 C.E. Andesite. (3 images)



City of Cusco plan



Curved Inka wall of Oorikancha with Santo Domingo convent

© Michael Freeman/Corbis



Walls at Saqsa Waman (Sacsayhuaman)

© Gianni Dagli Orti/The Art Archive at Art Resource, NY

160. Maize cobs. Inka. c. 1440–1533 C.E.
Sheet metal/repoussé, metal alloys.



Maize cobs

© bpk, Berlin/Ethnologisches Museum, Staatliche Museen/Claudia Obrocki/Art Resource, NY

161. City of Machu Picchu. Central highlands, Peru. Inka. c. 1450–1540 C.E. Granite
(architectural complex). (3 images)



City of Machu Picchu

© Hugh Sitton/Corbis



Observatory

© Nick Saunders/Barbara Heller Photo Library, London/Art Resource, NY

City of Machu Picchu, continued



Intihuatana Stone

© DEA/G. DAGLI ORTI/De Agostini Picture Library/Getty Images

162. All-T'oquepu tunic. Inka. 1450–1540 C.E. Camelid fiber and cotton.



All-T'oquepu tunic

© Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.

163. Bandolier bag. Lenape (Delaware tribe, Eastern Woodlands). c. 1850 C.E. Beadwork on leather.



Bandolier bag

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164. Transformation mask. Kwakwaka'wakw, Northwest coast of Canada. Late 19th century C.E. Wood, paint, and string. (2 images)



Transformation mask, closed
© Musée du Quai Branly/Scala/Art Resource, NY



Transformation mask, open
© Musée du Quai Branly/Scala/Art Resource, NY

165. Painted elk hide. Attributed to Cotsiogo (Cadzi Cody), Eastern Shoshone, Wind River Reservation, Wyoming. c. 1890–1900 C.E. Painted elk hide.



Painted elk hide
Courtesy of School for Advanced Research, Catalog Number SAR.1978-1-87/Photograph by Addison Doty

166. Black-on-black ceramic vessel. Maria Martínez and Julian Martínez, Tewa, Puebloan, San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico. c. mid-20th century C.E. Blackware ceramic.



Black-on-black ceramic vessel
© Barbara Gonzales, Great Granddaughter of Maria and Julian Martínez