

Americas (1300-1700) and Africa (1000-1700)

ART OF THE AMERICAS (1300-1700)

Key Ideas

- Luxury objects were produced to support prestige and power of leaders. Cultures were involved in wide networks of trade.
- Burial practices often included placing status objects in graves, to assist the person in the afterlife.
- The Aztec and Inca formed large empires through conquest. Both cultures displayed a mastery in engineering monumental architecture and sculpture.
- Many cultures share a common belief in spiritual powers embodied in animals, landscape features, and plants, with great respect given to those individuals able to connect to those powers through rituals.
- All early American cultures suffered severe loss of life and suppression of their indigenous beliefs from initial contact with Europeans. Colonial cultures that developed after contact often synthesized indigenous and European beliefs.

NOTE: The first three objects listed are from earlier cultures in the Americas (pre-1300)

- *Maskette*, Inuit or Yup'ik, Wood with shell or ivory, 500 BCE-500 CE, 2014.97.17
- *Effigy Pots (Seated Figure, Bird, and Bear)*, Casas Grandes, Earthenware and pigment, c. 1000-1300, (83.90.1, 2, and 3)
- *Olla*, Casas Grandes, Clay and pigment, c. 1000-1300, 47.53.4

- *Bottle*, Caddo (Mississippian), clay and pigment, 1250-1499, 90.2.5
- *Underwater Panther*, Quapaw (Mississippian), clay and pigment, c. 1500, 2004.33
- *Bowl*, Four Mile (Ancestral Puebloan), clay and pigment, 1350-1400, 98.3.1
- *Bowl*, Four Mile (Ancestral Puebloan), clay and pigment, 1100-1300, 99.70.1
- *Chalchihuitlicue*, (She of the Jade Skirt), Mexica (Aztec), gray basalt and red ochre, 1200-1521, 2009.33
- *Silver llama*, Inca, 2 1/2" tall, 2002.132 (not on view)
- *Bottle*, Inca, ceramic, 2004.69 (not on view)
- *Kero*, Inca, wood, 1470-1560, 93.47 (not on view)
- *Ear spools*, Chimú, gold alloy, 1150-1450, 43.4.1,2

Terms and Names

Mesoamerica: Describes historic cultures in the following regions: Central Mexico through Yucatan Peninsula, Guatemala, and Belize to the western sections of Honduras and El Salvador. Scholars call the art and cultures west of the Isthmus of Tehuantepec "Mexican," and the art to the east "Maya." (O'Riley, 286)

Central America: Geographic term, used to describe the southernmost area of North America, including Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Belize, and Guatemala.

Latin America: Linguistic and cultural term, indicating Spanish and Portuguese-speaking countries in the Americas.

Moctezuma II: Leader of the Aztec at time of Spanish conquest.

Cortés: Spaniard who conquered the Aztec.

Tenochtitlán: Capitol city of the Aztec Empire (modern Mexico City).

Pizarro: Spaniard who conquered the Inca.

Atawalpa/Atahualpa: Leader of the Inca at the time of the Spanish conquest.

Cuzco: Capitol city of the Inca Empire.

Chicha: Fermented maize beer.

Quipu: Inca recording device, made of knotted strings and colored threads.

Kero: Cup used by the Inca to drink chicha at special ceremonies/feasts.

ART OF AFRICA, focusing on sub-Saharan Africa (1000-1700)

Key Ideas

- Africa is a continent, not a country! African arts widely vary in materials and styles. Objects were often meant for active display or to be in motion.
- Luxury objects were produced to support prestige and power of leaders. Leaders were often thought to have spiritual connections to the gods and ancestors.
- Beliefs often existed in an otherworld inhabited by the spirits, deities, and ancestors who “mediate in the affairs of this world” (Kampen O’Riley, 230). Ritual performances (including dancing, music, and offerings) connect the living with the spirits. Ancestors, or the founders of a cultural group, were a popular subject matter of African objects.
- Cultures participated in wide networks of long-range trade throughout Africa. In the 15th century, Europeans began trading relationships with cultures like the Benin.

Nok

- *Head, Nok*, 1000 BCE to 300 CE, terracotta, 2002.27.16

Djenne (Malian)

- *Equestrian figure*, Malian, 13th-15th century, wood, 83.168

Ife (Yoruba)

- *Shrine Head*, Yoruba (Ancient Ife), 12th to 14th century, terracotta, 95.84

Benin (Edo)

- *Plaque*, Edo (Benin), Brass, 16th-17th century, L2013.116
- *Tusk*, Edo (Benin), 1775-1777, ivory, 56.33
- *Water pitcher*, Edo (Benin), bronze, 18th century, 58.9
- *Memorial Head*, Edo (Benin), bronze, 1550-1650, 2007.13

Terms

Equestrian figure: Person riding a horse.

Oni: King of Ancient Ife.

Oba: King of Benin/Edo people.

Additional Resources

Unesco site on Paquimé, Casas Grandes: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/560/video>

Unesco site on Tenochtitlán (Mexico City): <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/412/video>

Unesco site on Machu Picchu: <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/274/video>

For more information on ancient African cultures, click on this link to the subject in Art and Life in Africa:

<https://africa.uima.uiowa.edu/chapters/ancient-africa/>

Khan Academy’s discussion of the Aztec calendar stone:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zn03u3-U1fk>

For techniques of lost wax casting: <http://www.louvre.fr/en/clefanalyses/lost-wax-casting>