

Art of the Americas

TIME PERIOD: 3500 B.C.E.-1492 C.E. AND BEYOND

Some of the main periods are these:

Civilization	Date	Location
Chavín	900–200 B.C.E.	Coastal Peru
Mayan	300–900 C.E. and later	Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Yucatán
Anasazi	550–1400 C.E.	American Southwest
Mississippian	800–1500 C.E.	Eastern United States
Aztec	1400–1521	Central Mexico, centered in Mexico City
Inka	1438–1532	Peru
North American Indian	18th century to present	North America

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING: The indigenous Americas have among the oldest art traditions in the world.

Essential Knowledge:

- Ancient America can be divided into many cultural and historical groupings both in North and South America.
- Art in these regions is often animal based (feathers, hides, etc.) and used in shamanistic rituals. Art carved from stone is also important.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING: Mesoamerican art (from Mexico to Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize) is characterized by architectural structures such as pyramids, a strong influence of astronomy and calendars on ritual objects, and great value placed on green objects, such as jade or feathers.

Essential Knowledge:

- Pyramids began as earthworks and then grew to multi-level structures. Sites were often added to over many years. Most architecture is made of stone, using the post and lintel system and faced with painted sculpture. There are usually large plazas before the pyramids.

- Sculpture relates the deeds of rulers and epic stories of the gods. Artists generally worked under a united vision in a workshop. The audience for art could be an entire city or an intimate religious circumstance.
- Mesoamericans have had an influence on the Spanish who occupied the area, both commercially and artistically.
- Mesoamerican objects were valued and treasured in Europe by connoisseurs and collectors. Increased recognition of their value today has led to a greater understanding of their contribution to world art.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING: Andean art (from Peru, Bolivia, and Ecuador) relies on shamanistic rituals involving a special veneration for the natural world.

Essential Knowledge:

- Geography plays a key role in understanding Andean art. People of the coastal plains often acted individually; those in the mountains united against the elements. The geographic diversity accounts for the differing materials used in the creation of works of art.
- Most Andean art seems to have been a workshop system whereby many collaborate on a single piece.
- Most common Andean findings have been in graves; a great many works were done for funerary purposes.
- Andean art has had an influence on modern European and Latin American artists.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING: North American Indians have undergone widespread persecution and cultural reshaping since the arrival of Europeans.

Essential Knowledge:

- Many interdisciplinary sources are used to piece together the major monuments of Native North Americans.
- Archaeology, oral and written history, documents, and museum records form the basis of North American Indian research.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING: Modern Native Americans maintain active cultural identities today.

Essential Knowledge:

- There is no uniform naming structure for the original people of this area.
- In addition to traditional North American materials and techniques used in artwork (weaving, basketry, wood, bone, hides, and ceramic), objects that have been traded with outsiders (beads, ribbons) have become part of the Indian artistic experience.
- Many motifs, such as animals and geometric designs, appear in North American art. Respect for nature, religion, and elders are dominant themes.
- Art was created mostly for groups, as the patrons were likely important tribal leaders. Artists worked in groups in an apprentice-type relationship.
- Native North American art has had a minimal impact on European and American styles. However, a revival movement has invigorated cultural traditions and opened them up to a wider market.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Humans are not native to the "New World"; Americans do not have an ancestry dating back millions of years, the way they do in Africa or Asia. People migrated from Asia to America over a span of perhaps 30,000 years, crossing over the Bering Strait when the frozen winters made the way walkable. Eventually people understood that the climate was good enough to raise crops, particularly in what is today Mexico and Central America, and the population boomed.

As in other parts of the world, local rivalries and jealousies have played their part in the ebb and flow of American civilizations. Some civilizations are intensely cultivated and technological, refining metal ore and developing a firm understanding of astronomy and literature. Others remained nomadic and limited their activities as hunter-gatherers. In any case, when the European colonizers arrived at the end of the fifteenth century, they encountered in some ways a very sophisticated society, but in others, one that did not even possess a functioning wheel and refined metals mostly for jewelry rather than for use.

Each succeeding civilization buried or destroyed the remains of the civilization before, so only the hardiest ruins have survived the test of time. Most of what can be gleaned about pre-Columbian American society is ascertained by archaeologists working on elaborate burial grounds or digging through the ruins of once-great ancient cities.

Patronage and Artistic Life

Artists were commoners, as was true in most societies in the ancient world. Because of their special abilities, however, artists were employed by the state to work at important sites instead of doing menial labor. Some were even members of the royalty. Artists were trained in an apprenticeship program, and reached fame through the rendering of beautifully crafted items.

Ancient Americans used an extremely wide variety of materials in their artwork, usually capitalizing on what was locally available. Since they did not have draught animals, and since wheeled carts were unknown, artists were reliant on what was locally produced, or on objects small enough to trade and carry. Even so, Aztecs, for example, carved in obsidian, jade, copper, gold, turquoise, basalt, sandstone, granite, rock crystal, wood, limestone, and amethyst, among many other media.

Tropical cultures profited from the skins of animals and feathers of birds and produced great works using brilliant plumage. Featherwork became a distinguished art form in the hands of Pre-Columbian artists.

CHAVÍN ART

Chavín is a civilization named after its main archaeological site, preserved in coastal Peru. Chavín art is dominated by figural compositions, often shown in a combination of human and animal motifs. Many figures unite various animal forms into one being: fanged mouths are merged with serpents in the hair, for example. Figures are generally heavily rendered with an eye to monumentality. Symmetry is desired; works are carved in low relief on polished surfaces that use rectangular formats.

Chavín architects chose sites that were dramatic, sometimes on mountain tops. Often buildings, such as those at Chavín de Huántar, were built around a U-shaped plan that embraced a plaza and faced out toward an expansive view. Stepped platforms rise to support ceremonial buildings. Some sites are oriented to the cardinal points on the compass,

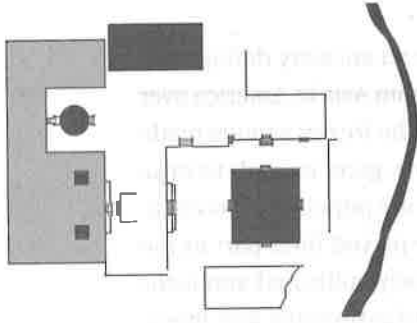


Figure 26.1a: Plan of Chavín de Huántar, 900–200 B.C.E., Peru

but at Chavín the site seems to be coordinated with an adjacent river, which some say was a reference to water sources and their importance to society.

Chavín de Huántar, 900–200 B.C.E., Peru

- A religious capital
- Temple was 60 meters tall adorned by a jaguar sculpture, a symbol of power
- Hidden entrance to the temple led to stone corridors

Plan and Lanzón Stone, granite (Figures 26.1a and 26.1b)



Figure 26.1b: Lanzón Stone, 900–200 B.C.E., granite, Peru

- Inside the Old Temple of Chavín there is a maze-like system of hallways
- At the center, underground, is the *Lanzón* (Spanish for “blade”) stone
- Fifteen feet tall; blade shaped
- Depicts a powerful figure that is part human (body) and part animal (claws, fangs)
- Head of snakes and face of a jaguar
- Eyebrows terminate in snakes
- Flat relief; designs in a curvilinear pattern
- Served as a cult figure
- Center of pilgrimage; however, few had access to the Lanzón Stone
- Modern scholars hypothesize that the stone acted as an oracle, hence a point of pilgrimage



Figure 26.1c: Relief sculpture, granite, 900–200 B.C.E., Peru

Relief sculpture, granite, Chavín de Huántar (Figure 26.1c)

- Located on the ruins of a stairway at Chavín
- Shows jaguars in shallow relief

Nose ornament, gold alloy, Cleveland Museum of Art (Figure 26.1d)

- Worn by males and females under the nose
- Held in place by the semi-circular section at top
- Two snake heads on either end
- Makes the wearer into a supernatural being during ceremonies

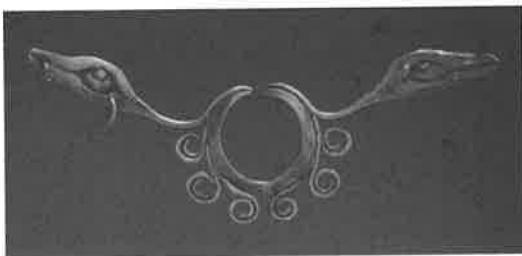


Figure 26.1d: Nose ornament, gold alloy, Cleveland Museum of Art

MAYAN ART

Mayan sculpture is easy to recognize, because of the unusual Mayan concept of ideal beauty. The model seems to have been a figure with an arching brow, with the indentation above the nose filled in as a continuous bridge between forehead and nose. Most well-to-do Mayans put their children in head braces to create this symbol of beauty if the child was not born with it. Facial types are long and narrow, with full lips and mouths ready to speak. It is common to see figures elaborately dressed with costumes composed of feathers, jade, and jaguar skin. The Mayans preferred narrative art done in relief sculpture. Their relief work has crisp outlines with little attention given to modeling.

Mayan sculpture is typically related to architectural monuments: Lintels, facades, jambs, and so on. Figures of gods are stylized and placed in conventional hieratic poses possessing symbols of beauty, most notably tattooing and crossed eyes. Most Mayan sculptures were painted.

A typical work that appears everywhere in Mayan cities is the **chacmool**, a figure that is half-sitting and half-lying on his back. The unusual pose of the figure is balanced by the face which turns 90 degrees from the body. Elbows firmly rest on the ground, lending a sloping sense to the body. On his stomach is a plate, which has made some scholars deduce that the figure was meant to receive offerings. Sculptures such as these influenced modern artists such as Henry Moore.

Mayan pyramids are set in wide plazas as a center of civic focus. Grandly proportioned temples accompany pyramids, although their interiors are narrow and tall, giving a certain claustrophobic effect enhanced by the use of corbelled vaulting. Temples had long roof combs on the roof to accentuate their verticality.

Yaxchilán, 725 c.e., limestone, Chiapas, Mexico (Figures 26.2a, 26.2b, and 26.2c)

- City set on a high terrace; plaza surrounded by important buildings
- Flourished c. 300–800 c.e.

Structure 40, Yaxchilán, 725 c.e., limestone, Chiapas, Mexico (Figure 26.2a)

- Built by ruler Bird Jaguar IV, or his son who dedicated it to him
- Overlooks the main plaza
- Three doors leading to a central room decorated with stucco
- Roof remains nearly intact, with a large roof comb (ornamented stone tops on roofs)
- Corbel arch interior



Figure 26.2a: Structure 40, Yaxchilán, 725 c.e., limestone, Chiapas, Mexico



Figure 26.2b: Lintel 25, Structure 23, Yaxchilán, 725 c.e., limestone, British Museum, London



Figure 26.2c: Structure 33, Yaxchilán, 725 c.e., limestone, Chiapas, Mexico

Lintel 25, Structure 23, Yaxchilán, 725 C.E., limestone, British Museum, London (Figure 26.2b)

- Lintel originally set above the central doorway of Structure 23
- Building dedicated to Lady Xoc
- Lady Xoc (bottom right) invoking the Vision Serpent to commemorate her husband's rise to the throne
- She holds a bowl with bloodletting ceremonial items: stinging spine and bloodstained paper
- Vision Serpent has two heads: one has a warrior emerging from its mouth; the other has Tlaloc, a war god
- Inscription written as a mirror image—extremely unusual in Mayan script; uncertain meaning, perhaps indicating she has a vision from the other side of existence, and she is acting as an intercessor or shaman

Structure 33, Yaxchilán, 725 C.E., limestone, Chiapas, Mexico (Figure 26.2c)

- Restored temple structure
- Remains of roof comb with perforations
- Three central doorways lead to a large single room
- Corbel arch interior
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Temples**
 - White Temple on Its Ziggurat (Figure 2.1a)
 - Lakshmana Temple (Figures 23.7a, 23.7b)
 - Todai-ji (Figure 25.1a)

ANASAZI ART

Anasazi is a term that means “ancient ones” or “ancient enemies” in the Navajo language. They are most famous for their meticulously rendered **pueblos**, which are composed of local materials. A core of rubble and mortar is usually faced with a veneer of polished stone. The thickness of the base walls were used to determine the size of the overall superstructure, with some pueblos daring to raise themselves five or six stories tall. All pueblos faced a well-defined plaza that was the religious and social center of the complex.



Figure 26.3 Mesa Verde cliff dwellings, Anasazi, 450–1300 C.E., sandstone, Montezuma County, Colorado

Mesa Verde cliff dwellings, Anasazi, 450–1300 C.E., sandstone, Montezuma County, Colorado (Figure 26.3)

- Pueblo built into the sides of a cliff, housed about 250 people
- Clans moved together for mutual support and defense
- Top-ledge stores all supplies, cool and dry area out of the way, accessible only by ladder
- Plaza in front of abode structure; kivas face the plaza
- Each family received one room in the dwelling
- Farming done on plateau above pueblo, everything had to be imported into the structure, including water
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Cliffside**
 - Bamiyan Buddhas (Figures 23.2a, 23.2b)
 - Longmen Caves (Figures 24.9a, 24.9b)
 - Petra (Figure 6.9b)

MISSISSIPPIAN ART

An increase in agriculture meant a population boom, as sustained communities evolved in fertile areas. Eastern Native Americans were mound-builders and created an impressive series of earthworks that survive in great numbers even today. Huge mound complexes, such as Cahokia, Illinois, were impressive city-states that governed wide areas. Other mounds, such as **Great Serpent Mound** (Figure 26.4), were built in effigy shapes of uncertain meaning. Many of these mounds have baffled archaeologists, because they clearly could only be fully appreciated from the air or a high vantage point, which mound builders did not possess.

Great Serpent Mound, Mississippian (Eastern Woodlands), c. 1070 C.E., earthwork, Adams County, southern Ohio (Figure 26.4)

- Many mounds were enlarged and changed over the years, not built in one campaign
- Effigy mounds popular in Mississippian culture
- Influenced by comets? Astrological phenomenon? Head pointed to summer solstice sunset?
- Rattlesnake as a symbol in Mississippian iconography; could this play a role in interpreting this mound?
- Snakes associated with crop fertility
- There are no burials or temples associated with this mound
- Theory that it could be a representation of Halley's Comet in 1066
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Earthworks**
 - Smithsonian, *Spiral Jetty* (Figure 22.26)



Figure 26.4: Great Serpent Mound, Mississippian (Eastern Woodlands), c. 1070 C.E., earthwork, Adams County, southern Ohio

AZTEC ART

Aztec art is most famously represented by gold jewelry that survives in some abundance, and jade and turquoise carvings of great virtuosity. The aggressive nature of Aztec religions, with its centering on violent ceremonies of blood-letting, was often manifest in great stone sculptures of horrifying deities such as **Coyolxauhqui**, whose characteristics include human remains from bloody sacrifices.

Templo Mayor (Main Temple), 1375–1520, stone, Tenochtitlán, Mexico City, Mexico (Figure 26.5a)

- Tenochtitlán laid out on a grid; city seen as the center of the world
- Two temples atop pyramid, each with a separate staircase
- North: dedicated to Tlaloc: god of rain, agriculture
- South: dedicated to Huitzilopochtli: god of sun and war
- Spring and autumn equinoxes: sun rises between the two
- Large braziers put on top where the sacred fires burned
- Temples begun in 1375, rebuilt six times, destroyed by the Spanish in 1520



Figure 26.5a: Templo Mayor (Main Temple), 1375–1520, stone, Tenochtitlán, Mexico City, Mexico



Figure 26.5b: Coyolxauhqui Stone, volcanic stone



Figure 26.5c: Calendar Stone, basalt



Figure 26.5d: Olmec-style mask, jadeite

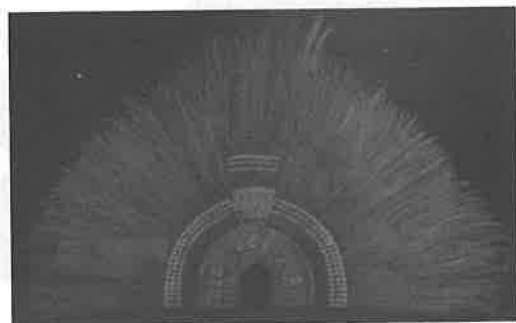


Figure 26.6: Ruler's feather headdress (probably of Motecuhzoma II), 1428-1520, feathers (quetzal and blue cotinga) and gold, Museum of Ethnology, Vienna

Coyolxauhqui "She of the Golden Bells," 1469 (?), volcanic stone, Museum of the Templo Mayor, Mexico City (Figure 26.5b)

- So-called because of the bells she wears as earrings
- Aztecs similarly dismembered enemies and threw them down the stairs of the great pyramid to land on the disk of Coyolxauhqui
- Circular relief sculpture
- Coyolxauhqui and her many brothers plotted the death of her mother Coatlicue, who became pregnant after tucking a ball of feathers down her bosom. When Coyolxauhqui chopped off Coatlicue's head, a child popped out of the severed body fully grown, and dismembered Coyolxauhqui, who fell dead at the base of the shrine
- Represents the dismembered moon goddess who is placed at the base of the twin pyramids of Tenochtitlán
- Aztec sacrificed people and then threw them down the steps of the temple dismembered; Huitzilopochtli did this to Coyolxauhqui
- Relationship between the death and decapitation of Coyolxauhqui with the sacrifice of enemies at the top of Aztec pyramids
- Once brilliantly painted
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Human Figure in Relief**
 - *Akhenaton, Nefertiti, and Three Daughters* (Figure 3.10)
 - *Victory Adjusting Her Sandal* (Figure 4.6)
 - Anthropomorphic stele (Figure 1.2)

Calendar Stone, basalt (Figure 26.5c)

- Circular shape reflects the cyclic nature of time
- Place where rituals took place on certain days
- Aztecs felt they needed to feed the Sun god human hearts and blood regularly
- Tongue in the center of the stone coming from the god's mouth was a sacrificial flint knife used to slash open the victims
- Used the Calendar Stone as an altar to murder victims, and then threw them down the steps of the temple to the base where the Coyolxauhqui Stone rests

Olmec-style mask, jadeite (Figure 26.5d)

- Found on the site; actually a much older work executed by the Olmecs
 - Olmec works have a characteristic frown on the face; pugna-cious visage; heavy lidded eyes; headgear suggested
 - Shows that the Aztecs collected and embraced art work from other cultures

Ruler's feather headdress (probably of Motecuhzoma II), 1428-1520, feathers (quetzal and blue cotinga) and gold, Museum of Ethnology, Vienna (Figure 26.6)

- 400 long green feathers are the tails of sacred quetzal birds; male birds produce only two such feathers each
- 400 symbolizes eternity

- Only known feather headdress in the world
- Headdress probably part of a collection of artifacts given by Motechuzoma (Montezuma) to Cortez for Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Exotic Materials**
 - ‘Ahu ’ula (Figure 28.4)
 - Circle of the González Family, *Screen with the Siege of Belgrade and Hunting Scene* (Figures 18.3a, 18.3b)
 - González, *Virgin de Guadalupe* (Figure 18.4)

INKAN ART

Inkan architecture defies the odds by building impressive and well-designed cities in some of the most inaccessible or inhospitable places on earth. Typically Inkan builders used **ashlar masonry** of perfectly grooved and fitted stones placed together in almost a jigsaw puzzle arrangement. All stones have slightly beveled edges that emphasize the joints. The buildings tend to taper upward like a trapezoid, the favorite building shape of early Americans.

The impressive Inka empire stretched from Chile to Colombia and was well-maintained by an organized system of roads that united the country in an efficient communication network. The Inka had no written language, so much of what we know about the civilization has been deduced from archaeological remains.

Maize cobs, c. 1400–1533, sheet metal/repoussé, gold and silver alloys, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin (Figure 26.7)

- Maize was the principal food source in the Andes
- Maize was celebrated by having sculptures fashioned out of sheet metal
- Black maize common in Peru; oxidized silver reflects that
- May have been part of a garden in which full sized metal sculptures of maize plants, and other items, were put in place alongside plants
- May have been used to ensure a successful harvest
- Repoussé technique
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Metalwork**
 - Merovingian Looped Fibula (Figure 10.1)
 - Golden Stool (Figure 27.4)
 - Muhammad ibn al-Zain, *Baptistère de St. Louis* (Figure 9.6)



Figure 26.7: Maize cobs, c. 1400–1533, sheet metal/repoussé, gold and silver alloys, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

City of Cusco plan, Peru, c. 1440 (Figure 26.8a)

- Historic capital of the Inkan empire
- In the shape of the puma, a royal animal
- Modern plaza is in the place where the puma's belly would be
- Head a fortress; heart a central square
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: City Planning**
 - Athenian Agora (Figure 4.15)
 - Forum of Trajan (Figure 6.10a)
 - Forbidden City (Figures 24.2a, 24.2b, 24.2c, 24.2d)

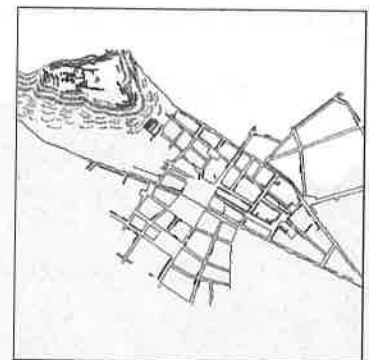


Figure 26.8a: Plan of the City of Cusco, c. 1440



Figure 26.8b: Qorikancha: main temple, church and convent of Santo Domingo, c. 1440, sandstone, Peru



Figure 26.8c: Walls at Saqsayhuaman (Sacsayhuaman), c. 1440, sandstone, Peru



Figure 26.9a: Machu Picchu, 1450–1540, granite, Peru



Figure 26.9b: Observatory, 1450–1540, granite, Peru

Qorikancha: main temple, church, and convent of Santo Domingo, c. 1440, sandstone, Peru (Figure 26.8b)

- Remains of the Incan Temple of the Sun form the base of the Santo Domingo convent built on top
- Original exterior walls of the Temple decorated in gold to symbolize sunshine
- Ashlar masonry; carefully grooved and beveled edges of the stone fitted together
- Qorikancha: golden enclosure; once was the most important temple in the Incan world
- Once was an observatory for priests to chart the skies
- Interior courtyard said to have been entirely covered in gold
- Walls taper upward; examples of Incan trapezoidal architecture

Walls at Saqsayhuaman (Sacsayhuaman), c. 1440, sandstone, Peru (Figure 26.8c)

- Complex outside the city of Cusco, Peru, at the head of the puma-shaped plan of the city
- Ashlar masonry
- Ramparts contain stones weighing up to seventy tons, brought from a quarry two miles away

Machu Picchu, 1450–1540, granite, Peru (Figure 26.9a)

- Originally functioned as a royal retreat
- Estate of fifteenth century Incan rulers
- So remote that it was probably not used for administrative purposes in the Inka world
- Buildings built of stone with perfectly carved rock rendered in precise shapes and grooved together; thatched roofs
- Two hundred buildings, mostly houses, some temples, palaces, baths, even an astronomical observatory; most using the basic trapezoidal shape
- People farmed on terraces
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Public spaces**
 - Acropolis (Figure 2.16a)
 - Persepolis (Figure 2.6a, 2.6b)
 - Mesa Verde (Figure 26.3)

Observatory, 1450–1540, granite, Peru (Figure 26.9b)

- Used to chart the sun's movements
- Ashlar masonry

Intihuatana Stone, 1450–1540, granite, Peru (Figure 26.9c)

- Intihuatana means “Hitching Post of the Sun,” aligns with the sun at the spring and the autumn equinoxes when the sun stands directly over the pillar, creating no shadow
- Inkan ceremonies held in concert with this event

All-T’oqapu tunic, 1450–1540, camelid fiber and cotton, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C. (Figure 26.10)

- Rectangular shape; a slit in the center for the head, then the tunic is folded in half and the sides are sewn for the arms
- Composition is comprised of small rectangular shapes called *t’oqapu*
- Individual *t’oqapu* may be symbolic of individuals, events or places
- This tunic contains a large number of *t’oqapu*
- Wearing such an elaborate garment would indicate the status of the individual
- May have been worn by an Inkan ruler
- Exhibits Inkan preference for abstract designs, standardization of designs, and an expression of unity and order
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Fabric Arts**
 - Funeral Banner of Lady Dai (Figure 24.4)
 - Hiapo (Figure 28.6)
 - *The Bayeux Tapestry* (Figures 11.7a, 11.7b)



Figure 26.9c: Intihuatana Stone, 1450–1540, granite, Peru



Figure 26.10: All-T’oqapu tunic, 1450–1540, camelid fiber and cotton, Dumbarton Oaks, Washington D.C.

NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN ART

Local products form the basis of most North American art forms: wood in the Pacific Northwest; clay, plant fibers, and wool in the American Southwest; and hides in areas populated by large animals like bison and deer. As with most nomadic or semi-nomadic peoples (although the Southwest Indians lived in large pueblos or cliff dwellings with fairly sophisticated agricultural programs), geometric designs on ceramics and utilitarian objects and highly decorated fabric with beading and weaving mark their art. Plains Indians even illustrated hides to relate myths and events pertinent to their tribal histories. As the influence of the European settlers spread throughout the Indian nations, native Indian artists were keen to adapt their traditional art forms to new media introduced from abroad. The Europeans also brought with them a curiosity about native art forms, and acted as collectors and patrons for works that appealed to their sensibilities. Thus native American artists, like Cadzi Cody in hide painting and Maria Martínez in ceramics, began serving an emerging tourist industry that appreciated their artistry.

Bandolier bag, Lenape (eastern Delaware) tribe, c. 1850, beadwork on leather, Children’s Museum of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana (Figure 26.11)

- Bandolier bag has a large heavily beaded pouch with a slit on top
- Bag held at hip level; strap across the chest
- Bag constructed of trade cloth: cotton, wool, velvet, or leather
- Beadwork not done in the Americas before European contact
- Beads imported from Europe



Figure 26.11: Bandolier bag, Lenape tribe, c. 1850, beadwork on leather, Children’s Museum of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana



Figure 26.12a: Transformation mask, Kwakiutl, Northwest coast of Canada, late 19th century, wood, paint, and string, Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana



Figure 26.12b: Interior of Transformation mask



Figure 26.13: Attributed to Cotsiogo (Cadzi Cody), Hide Painting of a Sun Dance, c. 1890–1900, painted elk hide, Cowan's Auctions, Inc., Cincinnati, Ohio

- Made for women; objects of prestige
- Native American and European motifs
- Functional and beautiful
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Functional Works of Art**
 - *Niobid Krater* (Figure 4.19)
 - Navigation Chart (Figure 28.3)
 - Duchamp, *Fountain* (Figure 22.9)

Transformation Mask, Kwakiutl, Northwest coast of Canada, late nineteenth century, wood, paint, and string, Children's Museum of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, Indiana (Figures 26.12a and 26.12b)

- Masks worn by native people of the Pacific Northwest, western Canada, and Alaska
- Worn over the head as part of a complete body costume
- During a ritual performance the wearer opens and closes the transformation mask using strings
- Opening the mask reveals another face inside
- Bird exterior opens to reveal human face on interior
- At the moment of transformation, the performer turns his back to the audience to conceal the action and heighten the mystery
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Human and Animal Hybrids**
 - Sphinx (Figure 3.6a)
 - Running Horned Woman (Figure 1.9)
 - Mutu, *Preying Mantra* (Figure 29.25)

Attributed to Cotsiogo (Cadzi Cody), Hide Painting of a Sun Dance, Eastern Shoshone, Wind River Reservation, Wyoming, c. 1890–1900, painted elk hide, Cowan's Auctions, Inc., Cincinnati, Ohio (Figure 26.13)

- Worn as a robe over the shoulders of the warrior
- Warrior's deeds are celebrated on the hide
- Conveyed biographical details; personal accomplishments; heroism; battles
- Men painted hides to narrate an event
- Eventually painted hides for European and American markets
- Depicted traditional aspects of the Plains people culture that were nostalgic rather than practical: bison hunt with bow and arrow—nomadic hunting gone; bison nearly extinct
- Bison considered to be gifts from the Creator
- Horses in common use around 1750, liberated the Plains people
- Sun Dance conducted around a bison head—outlawed by the U.S. government; viewed as a threat to order
- Sun Dance: men dance; others sing, prepare the feast, drum, construct a lodge
- Teepee: made of hide stretched over poles
- Exterior poles reach the spirit world or sky

- Fire represents the heart
- Doorway faces east to greet the new day
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Animal Imagery**
 - Apollo 11 Stones (Figure 1.7)
 - Aka Elephant Mask (Figure 27.12)
 - Muybridge, *Horse in Motion* (Figure 21.5)

Maria Martínez and Julian Martínez, black-on-black ceramic vessel, Tewa, Puebloan, San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico, mid-twentieth century, Andrea Fisher Fine Pottery (Figure 26.14)

- Black on black vessels
- Highly polished surfaces
- Contrasts of shiny black and matte black finishes
- Comes from the 1000-year-old tradition of pottery making in the Southwest
- At the time of production, pueblos were in decline; modern life replacing traditional life
- Their work sparked a revival of pueblo techniques
- Maria made the pots; developed and invented more shapes than traditional pueblos used
- Julian painted the pots; uses a revival of ancient mythic figures and designs
- Exceptional symmetry; walls of even thickness; surfaces are free of imperfections
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons: Limited Color**
 - Weiwei, *Sunflower Seeds* (Figure 29.27)
 - Mblo (Figure 27.7)
 - *Shiva as Lord of Dance* (Figure 23.6)



Figure 26.14: Maria Martínez and Julian Martínez, black-on-black ceramic vessel. Tewa, Puebloan, San Ildefonso Pueblo, New Mexico, mid-twentieth century, Andrea Fisher Fine Pottery

VOCABULARY

- Ashlar masonry:** carefully cut and grooved stones that support a building without the use of concrete or other kinds of masonry (Figure 26.8b)
- Bandolier bag:** a large heavily beaded pouch with a slit on top (Figure 26.11)
- Chacmool:** a Mayan figure that is half-sitting and half-lying on his back
- Corbel arch:** a vault formed by layers of stone that gradually grow closer together as they rise and eventually meet
- Coyolxauhqui:** an Aztec goddess who died when she tried to assassinate her mother, Coatlicue (Figure 26.5b)
- Huitzilopochtli:** an Aztec god of the sun and war; sometimes represented as an eagle or as a hummingbird
- Kiva:** a circular room wholly or partly underground used for religious rites
- Pueblo:** a communal village of flat-roofed structures of many stories that are stacked in terraces; made of stone or adobe (Figure 26.3)
- Relief sculpture:** a sculpture which projects from a flat background (Figure 26.1c)
- Repoussé:** (French, meaning “to push back”) a type of metal relief sculpture in which the back side of a plate is hammered to form a raised relief on the front (Figure 26.7)
- Roof comb:** a wall rising from the center ridge of a building to give the appearance of greater height (Figure 26.2a)

Teepee: a portable Indian home made of stretched hides placed over wooden poles

Tlaloc: ancient American god who was highly revered; associated with rain, agriculture, and war

T'oqapu: small rectangular shapes in an Inkan garment (Figure 26.10)

Transformation mask: A mask worn in ceremonies by people of the Pacific Northwest, Canada, or Alaska. The chief feature of the mask is its ability to open and close, going from a bird-like exterior to a human-faced interior (Figures 26.12a and 26.12b)

SUMMARY

It is difficult to condense into a simple format the complex nature of ancient American civilizations. Some societies were nomadic and produced portable works of art that were meant for ceremonial use. Others established great cities in which ceremonial centers were carefully designed to enhance religious and secular concerns.

Each society of Indians used the local available materials to create their works. Indians from rich forest lands produced huge totem poles that symbolized the spirit of the living tree as well as the gods or legends carved upon them. Those from drier climates made use of adobe for their building material, as in the desert Southwest, or earthenware for fancifully decorated jugs and pitchers. The great cities of Mesoamerica are hewn from stone to create a symbol of permanence and stability in cultures that were more often than not dynamic and in flux.

It is common in ancient America for societies to build on the foundations of earlier cultures. Thus new cities spring from the ruins of the old, as pyramids are built over smaller structures on the same site.

PRACTICE EXERCISES

Multiple-Choice

1. Transformation masks are best understood as works
 - (A) used as centerpieces in homes
 - (B) that are seen as part of a larger ceremony
 - (C) used to recall ancestral spirits to act on the wearer's behalf
 - (D) used as a display much the same way that totem poles are used
2. Native American artworks often show the influence of Europeans in that they
 - (A) used European materials in their work
 - (B) portrayed European historical events with their own histories
 - (C) adapted European faith traditions and abandoned Native American imagery in their work
 - (D) experimented with European artistic techniques such as contrapposto and chiaroscuro

3. The image of Coyolxauhqui was carved on a round disk and placed
 - (A) at the top of an Aztec pyramid so people could worship it
 - (B) at the entrance to an Aztec temple complex so people could see to whom the complex was dedicated
 - (C) at the base of a pyramid so sacrificial victims could reenact the fate of Coyolxauhqui
 - (D) in the coronation room of the king so that his ancestral lineage could be observed by all

4. The Hide Painting of a Sun Dance attributed to Cotsiogo has a similar painting format to
 - (A) *Night Attack on the Sanjō Palace*
 - (B) *The Book of Lindisfarne*
 - (C) *Folio from a Qur'an*
 - (D) *The Court of Gayumars*

5. The Hide Painting of a Sun Dance attributed to Cotsiogo draws on Native American traditions
 - (A) in its use of the repoussé technique
 - (B) in that it shows great virtuosity in the handling of classical forms
 - (C) of articulating forms by placing them in an active sequence around a given space
 - (D) that place humans on an exaggerated scale dominating all other figures in a work

Short Essay

This is the Lanzón Stela from Chavín de Hunántar.



Where was this stela originally placed within the complex at Chavín?

Discuss the symbolism of its placement.

What is depicted on the stela *and* how does this depiction reflect the meaning of the work at this site?

ANSWER KEY

1. **B** 2. **A** 3. **C** 4. **B** 5. **C**

ANSWERS EXPLAINED

Multiple-Choice

1. **(B)** Transformation masks were only one part of a much larger ceremony of Kwakiutl Indians.
2. **(A)** When the Europeans settled in America, they often traded their materials for things the Indians valued. The Bandolier bag, for example, is made from beads imported from Europe.
3. **(C)** The disk containing the image of Coyolxauhqui was placed at the bottom of a pyramid. The Aztecs sacrificed people and then threw them down the pyramid the way Huitzilopochtli did to Coyolxauhqui. There was a relationship established between the death and decapitation of Coyolxauhqui and the sacrifice of Aztec enemies at the top of the pyramid.
4. **(B)** Both the hide painting and *The Book of Lindisfarne* were executed on animal skins.
5. **(C)** Native American art often places figures in an active sequence around a given space.

Short-Essay Rubric

Question	Points	Key Points in a Good Response
Where was this stela originally placed within the complex at Chavin?	1	Inside the Old Temple of Chavín there is a maze-like system of hallways. At the center, underground, is the Lanzón (Spanish for blade) stone.
Discuss the symbolism of its placement.	2	Modern scholars hypothesize that the stone acted as an oracle, hence a point of pilgrimage. Few people had access to the stone itself.
What is depicted on the stela and how does this depiction reflect the meaning of the work at this site?	2	It depicts a powerful figure that is part human (body) and part animal (claws, fangs), with the head of snakes and a face of a jaguar. Eyebrows terminate in snakes. It served as a cult figure that was awesome and ferocious to behold.