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For Immediate Use:
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Fowler exhibition of rare ceramic and gold objects reveals the rich cultures of ancient Colombia

Fowler in Focus: Encountering Ancient Colombia
A Journey through the Magdalena Valley

September 27, 2015–January 3, 2016

The Fowler Museum at UCLA presents “Encountering Ancient Colombia—A Journey through the Magdalena Valley,” a selection of rare ceramic objects from pre-colonial Colombia. Drawn primarily from the Muñoz Kramer Collection of ancient Colombian ceramics at LACMA, these works include fascinating vessels and sculptural forms, many never exhibited before. A small number of breathtaking gold objects from a private collection are included. Most of these works come to us separated from their original archaeological contexts, challenging us to reconstruct their origins from the evidence still available.



The reconstruction of Colombia’s ancient past involves the work of archaeologists, ethnographers, art historians, and historians—each discipline illuminating different facets of a vanished world. Given such a complex endeavor, there are a variety of possible interpretations. As visitors make their way through the exhibition, they will find quotations from 16th-century Spanish chroniclers and the insights of 20th-

century ethnographers presented alongside the objects. Organized geographically by culture, each display case invites visitors to consider how we know what we think we know about these objects and the peoples who made them. The installation seeks to question our knowledge of the ancient ceramics and gold on view and to illustrate the rich cultures and astonishing world of pre-colonial Colombia.

One particularly compelling section of the installation explores the important theme of supernatural or hybrid beings in art associated with the Tairona culture. Objects in this section show animals with human features and humans with animal attributes, such as protruding snouts, fangs, or limbs in the form of snakes. Using a combination of historical sources and ethnographic research, we now understand such figures to represent shamanic practices, in particular transformation and divination. In the Americas shamans are generally distinguished by their ability to travel out of their bodies in spirit forms. Ceramic and gold representations of figures with animal appendages or attributes appear to depict the moment of actual transformation.



Another section focuses on objects associated with death and burial practices in the middle Magdalena Valley. A large proportion of ancient Colombian objects, including many of the ceramic and gold pieces on display, were most likely found in tombs. The reasons for their inclusion in burials are varied: some were containers filled with food and drink to sustain the deceased on his or her journey to the afterlife; others were personal belongings; still others may have been made especially for burial, to act as companions, guides, or protectors. Urns also were made to contain the bones and cremated ashes of the deceased. The exhibition features a large and dramatic burial urn from the area. Archaeological evidence strongly suggests that the urns were used for burial, many other questions about their use and decoration remain.

Encountering Ancient Colombia—A Journey through the Magdalena Valley is a collaboration between the Fowler and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) and was organized by Julia Burtenshaw, Postdoctoral Curatorial Fellow, Art of the Ancient Americas, LACMA.

The **Muñoz Kramer Collection** was acquired by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) as a shared resource for LACMA and the Fowler as part of an ongoing collaborative collections/exhibitions

initiative. A selection of works from the Muñoz Kramer collection is concurrently on display at LACMA in the exhibition *Ancient Colombia: A Journey through the Cauca Valley*, on view through April 10, 2016.

The Fowler Museum at UCLA is one of the country's most respected institutions devoted to exploring the arts and cultures of Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and the Americas. The Fowler is open Wednesdays through Sundays, from noon to 5 p.m.; and on Thursdays, from noon until 8 p.m. The museum is closed Mondays and Tuesdays. The Fowler Museum, part of UCLA Arts, is located in the north part of the UCLA campus. Admission is free. Parking is available for a maximum of \$12 in Lot 4. For more information, the public may call 310 825-4361 or visit fowler.ucla.edu.



RELATED EVENT:

Ancient Colombia: Heritage, Gold and a Lost City

Saturday, November 14, 10:30 am to 12:30 pm

Off-site at LACMA's Brown Auditorium

In conjunction with two exhibitions on ancient Colombia at the Fowler and LACMA, this off-site program at LACMA features presentations by distinguished scholars who explore the rich history and development of Colombian art and archaeology. The day begins with an introduction by the exhibitions' curator Julia Burtenshaw. Colin McEwan contextualizes ancient Colombian history and cultures in relation to wider northwest South America. Maria-Alicia Uribe elaborates on the beauty, importance, and meaning of Colombian gold and metalworks. Santiago Giraldo, provides an exclusive view of the breathtaking site of Ciudad Perdida (Lost City). To visit both exhibitions, a free round-trip shuttle to the Fowler from LACMA will be available at 1:30 pm. To reserve a spot on the shuttle, contact fowlerprograms@arts.ucla.edu. Co-presented by LACMA and the UCLA Cotsen Institute of Archaeology.

Images:

Stylized female figure. Colombia, Sinu, AD 800-1500. Ceramic. LACMA M.2007.146.622. The Muñoz Kramer Collection, gift of Camilla Chandler Frost and Stephen and Claudia Muñoz-Kramer. Photo © Museum Associates/ LACMA

Seated figure vessel (canastero) with serpent appendages. Tairona peoples, Colombia, 1000-1600 CE. Ceramic. LACMA M.2007.146.434. The Muñoz Kramer Collection, gift of Camilla Chandler Frost and Stephen and Claudia Muñoz-Kramer. Photo © Museum Associates/ LACMA

Nose ornament. Tairona peoples, Colombia, 900–1600 CE. Gold. Private collection