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“Fowler in Focus: Ancient Ceramics from Colombia”

Opens Oct. 5 at the Fowler Museum at UCLA



Standing Figure, Tumaco-La Tolita
Culture, 300 BCE-CE 300, Southwest
Coast, Colombia

More than four thousand years ago, Colombian men and women began to model their universe in clay, creating miniature impressions of the people and things that held special meaning for them. Before long, these works took on ritual and religious significance. In “Fowler in Focus: Ancient Ceramics from Colombia” —on view from Oct. 5, 2008–Feb. 22, 2009— visitors can see more than forty examples of these ancient works, including vessels ornamented with colorful designs adapted from weaving patterns, relief plaques depicting a couple embracing or a father and child, and numerous figures of people and animals.

The works on display represent a large variety of styles, from naturalistic to abstract. While one sculpted image may represent a true portrait of a defeated captive, others feature exaggerated body proportions and broad facial expressions. In some, a flat rectangular panel represents the human head, with just a few elegant lines signifying the nose, eyes and mouth. Sculpted clothing is often limited to a simple headdress, while line work or paint have been applied to define a skirt, tunic, or hip cloth. The jewelry that is shaped around the nose, ears, and the neck of many figures is representative of these ancient peoples’ magnificent cast gold traditions.

Many of the figures on display are thought to represent shamans in a trance-like state. Such representation of humans transforming into animals is pervasive, and alludes to the widespread belief that shamans could change themselves into animal spirit counterparts to perform acts of divination by contacting the supernatural.

The works in this exhibition are from the Muñoz Kramer collection, 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. The collection is meant to foster study

into the origins and development of the indigenous societies of lower Central and upper South America between B.C.E. 500 to C.E. 1500. A selection of works from this collection is also on display at LACMA.

Says John Pohl, the Fowler's curator of the arts of the Americas, "Together with the Fowler's collections of Andean and West Mexican ceramics and LACMA's strengths in Olmec, Maya and Aztec objects, Los Angeles has one of the premier Pre-Columbian collections in North America. The goal of this partnership between the two institutions is to promote access to these collections for the public, as well as for scholarly investigation by both UCLA students and Latin America scholars. This is an important collaboration in that it involves both a leading metropolitan museum and a leading university museum."

"Fowler in Focus: Ancient Ceramics from Colombia" will be on view in the Fowler in Focus gallery, the central space within "Intersections: World Arts, Local Lives." Fowler in Focus is dedicated to rotating installations of new acquisitions, sub-collections, and particular artistic genres in the Fowler's permanent holdings. 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's School of the Arts and Architecture, is located in the north part of the UCLA campus. Admission is free. Parking is available for a maximum of \$9 in Lot 4. For more information, the public may call 310/825-4361 or visit fowler.ucla.edu.