

SOME THOUGHTS ON LATIN AMERICAN ART HISTORY IN THE UNITED STATES

COLLEGES AND COLLECTIONS, 1870–2021

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ABSTRACT

This essay addresses the role of Latin American collections in U.S. museums, with particular attention to the college and university museum, and the accessibility of those collections to students and the public. At the same time, the essay considers the instruction of Latin American subjects, particularly in history and art history, that may or may not interface with the establishment of museum collections. The author argues for the role of technology in the dissemination and promulgation of Latin American visual culture.

KEYWORDS

Latin American art history; Latin American history pedagogy; U.S. college art museums; Provenance.

I. Introduction

Some years ago, I began to think about how technology has underpinned and shaped the discipline of the history of art in general, and in particular, how technology related to the discipline's development in the United States in the late nineteenth century and evolution over the early twentieth.¹ Art history's rise depended on publication and printing techniques, the fundamentals of visual dissemination. Lithography and photography were essential ingredients to the movement of knowledge in the beginning of study, as was the formation of collections that could be documented, and that would promote study and further publication. Because technology now changes more quickly than ever, whatever I write in these lines will be out of date by the time they see the cold light of your screen. Nevertheless, I make this attempt, looking backward and forward in 2023, and focused on institutional practice in the United States. What is also clear is that technology amplifies academic trends and practices, and this is true whether the resources are material or human. This is the case for Latin American art history as practiced in the United States.

Art history in the United States is a young discipline: broad humanistic inquiry grew slowly over the nineteenth century in institutions of higher learning, taking place with the study of classical languages based in memorization, as well as lectures in Christianity, philosophy, rhetoric, and mathematics. Here are some examples: by the end of the American Civil War, all students at Amherst College were expected to study French language to a level of reading literature, which did not include the modern novel.² At Yale College, until the advent of electives in the 1870s, the required curriculum in classics, recitation, oratory, and mathematics barely made room for "modern" subjects like the works of William Shakespeare or physics.³ Finding a place for art history, in general, required both an opening in the minds of educators *and* a technological advance that would allow its entry onto the stage of higher learning. Finding a place for Latin American art history, in particular, could come only after Latin American history itself was on the map – which would start at the University of California, Berkeley, before briefly taking

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I thank Suzanne Blier and The College Art Association, which first prompted me to ask some of these questions in 2017. After Lisa Trever asked me to write for this journal, I re-framed the concerns in light of Latin American art. Payton Phillips Quintanilla provided thoughtful feedback, as did various colleagues, and especially James Oles, in light of post-2020 publications and exhibitions.

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Amherst College, [History of the Department](#) (27 May 2023).

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George Pierson, *Yale College. An Educational History, 1871–1921*, New Haven, CT 1952, chapters 2 and 3.

hold at Yale, at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴ The study of Latin American history returned to Yale with the sporadic entry of Hiram Bingham, although he was away in Peru much of the time, but it would still be the middle of the twentieth century before a language other than French or German was an accepted “modern language” on campus. Even then, the history of Latin America was framed as military narratives, conquests, and independence movements: Latin American *art* history had to get in line.

II. Beginnings

Humanistic inquiry had to start somewhere, but of course no one was keeping track at the beginning. Whether among the Maya or the Greeks, the development of scripts that replicated speech made it possible to develop communications that could be carried long distances by an inanimate vehicle, to be read by a literate recipient. Ahead of writing that replicated speech, words could be retained and recalled, of course, but the transmission of the word was vulnerable, even with script, until there were means of replication, dependent on elite materials of scrolls and ink, and dry places to preserve them. Copies and translations multiplied through time. Carvings in stone were usually made in situ (or nearby) out of necessity, and although they allowed for public words, usually evidence of standardization, orthodoxy, and political power, the visual always held the possibility of greater polyvalence. Unlike writing that represents speech, the visual can be read from up or down or from left or right, breaking the image into multiple forms of communication about time and human imagination. One of the remarkable advances came when the eye could be trusted with how it managed information, and when the hand could replicate what the eye saw, rather than what the brain knew; a hand-eye problem that waxed and waned around the world, and across time. This allowed for the very capture of time in representation, from the turned leaf that revealed an invisible breath of air, to views of the body that revealed that it was moving in time: even the most frozen representation was not static, whether the duration of a breath or a shriek, and nuance could be observed within the work of art.

Nevertheless, word, image, and text may have all been on some equal footing until the early modern period. With the advent of the printing press, the word triumphed over the image. Religious transmission was easier to standardize, share, and enforce with consistent replication. I will skate across the social and political transformations that such dissemination helped make possible, from the Reformation to the Enlightenment, to independence movements across Latin America and unifications into new nation-states across Europe. And then there was the belated discovery in Europe and North America, in the mid-nineteenth century, of how to make

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Ibid., 276.

cheap paper from wood pulp. Suddenly inexpensive words could be everywhere. If the text had been king, it was now the emperor: whether the words came from the prophet Isaiah or Shakespeare's *Hamlet* Act IV, they could be read by anyone literate: any edition or pagination, the same lamentations, the same Claudius and Gertrude. An individual denied an elite education, but literate, and with access – and recognizing that racism denied access to broad swaths of the population – to a Carnegie Library in the United States, could find their way to the same words that the most elite person in the world had at his fingertips. Was this dissemination criticized? Was it complete? Certain texts were expurgated, to address a perceived danger of the word, and to control those words. Still, the sources for interpreting the past – whether Bernal Diaz's description of the "True Conquest", or Suetonius's *Twelve Caesars* – could also be consulted, as translations flourished at the beginning of the twentieth century. The story of America's history was inculcated through the development of textbooks that emphasized a single narrative, generally told around the same great men and played against the gazetteer, the book of maps that also told a story of colonization, independence movements, and geography. Beyond these maps, illustrations were by and large reserved for zoology and botany textbooks, alongside religious images designed to promote standardized belief.

III. Art History as Academic Discipline

What did it take to launch the field of art history?⁵ It took much more than the text, or even texts about art. It was harder to launch the history of art than the history of music: sheet music, by contrast, was circulated widely, carrying notes to wherever a voice or piano could turn the printed page into sound, and music transcended the constraints of language. At its birth in the late nineteenth century, the history of art was the most elite of humanistic inquiries, requiring access to works of art themselves, *and* a library in which to consult earlier references. Even the road map to the locations of works of art had not yet been written, whether in the religious establishment or the elite palace, and whether in Japan or Sweden; such information was more often found in guidebooks for travelers. The market made some works more available, yielding published price, auction, or sales lists, while other works quietly slipped into new hands, sometimes less accessible, sometimes more. Collections were formed at some European universities, notably the Ashmolean at Oxford, which changed course in the nineteenth century from the expanded curiosity cabinet of its seventeenth-century foundations to an institution grounded in Classical and Asian studies and collections. Important collections of European paintings, particularly Dutch, Italian, and French paintings, were established in the nineteenth century at the Fitzwilliam Museum of Cambridge. Universi-

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See the informative essays in Craig Smythe and Peter Lukehart, *The Early Years of Art History in the United States*, Princeton, NJ 1993.

ties were often in the vanguard: the Yale University Art Gallery had walls of paintings hung floor to ceiling for students to study because of the acquisition of Colonel John Trumbull's works early in the nineteenth century; prints of the Trumbull paintings in turn circulated imagery of the American Revolution widely across the United States, a visual and selective narrative of largely white male heroism.⁶ The Yale museum would also grow to have deep collections of what we now call the early modern by the middle of the nineteenth century (1871 collection of James Jackson Jarves), enshrining largely Roman Catholic works in what was then a Protestant university. Particularly at U.S. private institutions, but sometimes at public ones, colleges and universities came to view works of art as bearers of unique cultural knowledge, and so worthy of collection and preservation. For Latin America, the great visual documentation – say, in the lavish publication of Alexander von Humboldt or Julio Michaud – was kept in locked cases in elite libraries.⁷ Art could tell a story that might not be characteristic of the text, whether in the richness of painted fabrics or the glance that deflected attention away from a principal subject. Art's power would be reflected in prints and emulations; its ability, through drawings and workshops and choice of material, to offer a window on both a practice and a maker in a given place and time, could be recognized.

IV. Collection Matters

And so, collections grew at the college and university, reflecting donor interests, by and large, and their experiences abroad. Protestant missionaries from American colleges and universities worked across the globe, from Haiti to Oklahoma to Madagascar to Taiwan, and often in the Holy Land. For example, alumnae brought works of African and Chinese art to Mount Holyoke College (MHC), and in 1837, the “missionary collection” was, according to the MHC website, housed together in the original Seminary Building as “curiosities” from around the world.⁸ In 1860, reliefs from the palace of Ashurnasirpal II arrived at Bowdoin College.⁹ Examples at Yale were

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In Latin America itself, European prints served to disseminate piety and religious practice. There is a vast literature on the subject: a recent entry is Aaron M. Hyman, *Rubens in Repeat. The Logic of the Copy in Colonial Latin America*, Los Angeles 2021.

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Alexander von Humboldt, *Vues des Cordillères, et monumens des peuples indigènes de l'Amérique*, 2 vols., Paris 1816–1824; Julio Michaud, *Album pintoresco de la República Mexicana*, Mexico City [ca. 1850]. For important reviews of the dissemination of both works and documentation of those works, see Fausto Ramirez, *Algunas ideas sobre las colecciones de arte mexicano del siglo XIX en el mundo*, in: *México en el mundo de las colecciones de arte. México moderno*, Mexico City 1994, 3–21; and Elena Isabel Estrada de Gerlero, *En defensa de América. La difusión litográfica de las antigüedades mexicanas en el siglo XIX*, in: *México en el mundo de las colecciones de arte. México moderno*, Mexico City 1994, 23–37.

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Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, [Early Missionary Gifts to the College](#) (May 17, 2023).

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Bowdoin College Museum of Art, [Explore Ancient Assyrian Reliefs](#) (May 17, 2023).

purchased directly from the British excavations.¹⁰ In 1894, Dalzell A. Bunker, a missionary in Korea for forty years, donated the first works from Asia registered at Oberlin College: two from China, and one from Korea.¹¹ Meanwhile, entrepreneurs and wealthy travelers acquired classical antiquities and European art works for their own private collections, the type of works that were also the bread and butter of American museums, whether university or civic. Such acquisitions supported the early development of academic art history alongside public interest more generally, as one can see took place at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City.¹² Collections have shaped art history, just as art history has shaped collections. They matter.

But as in all such matters, Latin America was late to the party, if an invitation was even issued, at least from art museums. In the nineteenth century, natural history museums acquired works of Pre-Hispanic art, understood to be necessary for the studies scientists were conducting to understand the world's antiquity, including the very distribution of human beings and cultures across the planet. At the Yale Peabody Museum some acquisitions were opportunistic, such as the purchase of an important "Aztec calendar stone" [Fig. 1].¹³ Others were guided by the wishes of an alumni family, leading to the acquisition of a significant portion of the collection assembled by Emperor Maximilian in Mexico [Fig. 2], works that have no particular provenance but nevertheless form a snapshot of what was available for acquisition in the mid-nineteenth century.¹⁴ Roughly in these same years, Harvard's Peabody Museum launched an ambitious campaign of archaeology at Copan, Honduras, yielding important works that define the museum today although the large portion of the carved staircase and seated figure spent many years at the Fogg before the art museum curators found

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Yale University Art Gallery, *Relief: Human-headed genie watering sacred tree* (May 17, 2023).

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Charles Mason, The History of the Asian Art Collection at Oberlin College, in: *Allen Memorial Art Museum Bulletin* 53, 2003, 5–88.

12

Joanne Pillsbury, Recovering the Missing Chapters, in: Andrea Bayer with Laura D. Corey (eds.), *Making the Met*, New York 2020, 209–215.

13

George Grant MacCurdy, An Aztec "Calendar Stone" in Yale University Museum, in: *American Anthropologist* 12/4, 1910, 481–496. The interpretations proposed in 1910 were amplified by José Alcina Franch, together with a complete review of the Yale stone and others. Id., Cielo e inframundo en la cosmovisión mexicana. Análisis iconográfico, in: *Anuario de Estudios Americanos* 50/2, 1993, 4.

14

Brooke Loukkala, Collections and Recollections of "The Greatest of Nineteenth-Century Don Quixotes". Maximilian I's Imperial Legacy at the Yale Peabody Museum of Natural History, in: Andrew D. Turner and Megan E. O'Neil (eds.), *Collecting Mesoamerican Art before 1940. A New World of American Antiquities*, Los Angeles forthcoming.

it to be too ethnographic.¹⁵ Over the course of the twentieth century, collections of Pre-Hispanic art were being built in museums across the United States, including, as Matthew Robb has noted, at colleges and universities, among them Princeton, Duke, Notre Dame, Emory, and the University of Maine, among others.¹⁶

Nineteenth-century landscape painters across the Americas captured Latin America as subject – say, Frederic Church’s 1859 *The Heart of the Andes*, part of the Metropolitan’s permanent collection since 1909.¹⁷ José María Velasco received international acclaim for the Mexican landscape that he painted time and again, with prodigious output, and as Commissioner of Fine Arts of the Mexican delegation to the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, Velasco included his own paintings in the Mexican pavilion.¹⁸ Additionally, in the era of international arts and crafts revival, the decorative arts of Latin America, and particularly of Mexico, were keen subjects of acquisition by museums in the United States, especially Talavera ceramics.¹⁹ Although Latin America was often a subject of the U.S. and European gaze, modern currents pushing the course of art and, in turn, of art history, were focused in Paris and London, Berlin and New York, around 1900. The massive energies devoted by Archer Milton Huntington to the art and culture of Spain became manifest with the opening of the Hispanic Society in 1908, but in this venue, too, Latin America received little attention except as subject.²⁰ Huntington supported the training of professional art historians for the Society, but without a related teaching program at its founding, and with its project subsequently dampened by the long reign of General Franco, even Spanish art history languished in the United States, its great painters often seen

15

Pál Kelemen, *Stepchild of the Humanities. Art of the Americas, as Observed in Five Decades*, Tucson, AZ 1979.

16

Matthew H. Robb, The 500 Faces of Teotihuacan. Masks and the Formation of Mesoamerican Canons, in: Larry Silver and Kevin Terraciano (eds.), *Canons and Values. Ancient and Modern*, Los Angeles 2019, 114–137.

17

Deborah Poole, Landscape and the Imperial Subject. U.S. Images of the Andes, 1859–1930, in: Gilbert M. Joseph, Catherine C. LeGrand, and Ricardo D. Salvatore (eds.), *Close Encounters of Empire. Writing the Cultural History of U.S.-Latin American Relations*, Durham, NC 1998, 107–138.

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As recapitulated in the 2018 exhibition “Arte Diseño Xicágo. Mexican Inspiration from the World’s Columbian Exposition to the Civil Rights Era” at the National Museum of Mexican Art, Chicago.

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Edwin Atlee Barber was one of the first to write about collections of Talavera ceramics in the United States. Id., *The Maiolica of Mexico*, Philadelphia 1908. Mexican decorative arts – textiles, ceramics, furniture – were all widely collected in the United States.

20

An important exception is the Meadows Museum, at Southern Methodist University, dedicated to the collection of Spanish art and founded in 1965.



[Fig. 1]

Aztec calendar stone. Valley of Mexico, Mexico (YPM ANT 019231). Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Natural History, Division of Anthropology, Yale University. Photograph by William K. Sacco.



[Fig. 2]
Stone statue of Xipe Totec. Puebla, Mexico (YPM ANT 008525). Courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Natural History, Division of Anthropology, Yale University. Photograph by William K. Sacco.

as unicorns rather than as part of a compelling tradition.²¹ The decision in 1929 of Samuel Kress to establish the Kress Foundation and disseminate over 3000 works, principally early modern paintings and sculptures of Italy, to museums across the country, especially college and university museums, further underscored a concept of a canon based in Europe, and generally in Italy, France, Holland, and Germany. By extension, it also underscored what was *not* in that canon. When considered at all, the religiosity and piety that defined much Latin American Viceregal art contrasted with the rich Italianate traditions that stood at the forefront of European early modern painting; and without the personalities put forward by Vasari in his *Lives of the Artists*, translated into English in 1908 and henceforth widely read in the college course, early modern Latin American art and artists remained to one side of a European mainstream, especially when a formal art history entered college curricula.

Modern art in general made a slow entry into the U.S. museum but important collections of Latin American works were assembled between the world wars – the Los Angeles County Museum of Art acquired Diego Rivera’s *Flower Day* in 1925, the first major twentieth-century Latin American work to have a permanent U.S. home. MoMA and the Philadelphia Museum of Art were not far behind.²² Elizabeth Morrow gave key works by Diego Rivera to the Smith College Museum ahead of her acting presidency in 1939–40 (e.g., SC 1938.13.1), perhaps inspiring the donation years later of the famous self-portrait Rivera executed at the home of Irene Rich in 1941 (SC 1977.63.1). The accounts of Mexican muralists in the United States, as well as the work of U.S. muralists in Mexico is a complicated story: in terms of U.S. academic institutions, one of the signal events was the commissioning of José Clemente Orozco to paint the walls of the Dartmouth College library (completed 1934). Starting in 1963, what is now the Blanton Museum of Art at the University of Texas built the most comprehensive collection of modern Latin American art at any U.S. institution of higher learning, and the art history department (as well as a program in Latin American Studies) built a faculty to support Latin American history.²³ By comparison, the landmark exhibition at the Yale University Art Gallery of 1966, *Art of Latin America Since Independence*, had no impact on the museum’s collections, and the scanty text did not serve undergraduate teaching. Major exhibitions, from *Vida Americana* (Whitney 2020), to *Painting the Revolution* (Philadelphia Museum of Art 2016), to *South of the Border* (Yale 1992) have promoted interest, but only the last took place in the context of an academic museum. The breadth

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Lee Sorensen (ed.), “Brown, Jonathan M.”, in: *Dictionary of Art Historians* (May 27, 2023).

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Miriam Basilio, Deborah Cullen, Luis Perez-Oramas, Gary Garrels, Fatima Bercht, Harper Montgomery, Rocío Aranda-Alvarado, and James Wechsler, *Latin American & Caribbean Art. MoMA at El Museo*, New York 2004.

²³

The Latin American Collection of the Jack S. Blanton Museum of Art (May 27, 2023).

and range of Edward Sullivan at New York University, who has edited or written twenty-seven books or catalogues as of this writing, was transformative in shaping research and in training advanced students.²⁴ More recently, the Davis Museum, at Wellesley College, has developed collections across time and space of Latin America, forming one of the best “survey” collections in the United States.²⁵

These collections mattered and still matter. What is now clear is that the unique charismatic object, particularly deployed for historical inquiry or interrogated for meanings that may complicate or contradict a text, can open windows onto more nuanced understandings of the past by complicating the text-based narrative. The process of textual compilation so familiar to scholars transpires along a different axis in the world of art, where the practice of copying in one generation is more likely to lead to innovation in the next. There was probably a time that the replicated image was feared. Would photographs of works diminish the original? If a black-and-white print or photograph were available, would it discourage study of the original? We laugh now, because *that* replica was such a pale relative of the original, but what about the high-quality digital image, or the three-dimensional version that can be printed, for you to have and to hold? Those black-and-white photographs were expensive to produce: now it is faster to upload a picture and disseminate it than it is to type a text. But the original calls, and having the opportunity for students to gather around a work in person changes how one can and does see the world. That artificial intelligence will change the relationships in the very near term is more than a possibility.

Nothing could be more different from the circumstances of the reproduced art image at its birth. From nineteenth-century engraving and nineteenth-century photography, the nature of visual imagery marched along slowly, in increments that charted steady progress; color would replace black-and-white imagery. Still a very live practice when I began my studies, gaining knowledge of the world’s art principally took place by a student commandeering a large table, opening heavy and oversize books that might well not circulate, and beginning the study of the object, often with unillustrated catalogues and catalogues raisonnés juxtaposed with museum exhibition volumes and auction catalogues. Ambivalence was there from the beginning: the image of the work could not be adequately captured by other media, yet there was little other means for the study of works of art. The 1926 first edition of *Gardner’s Art through the Ages* was transformative, as were the boxes of University Prints (UPs) – they were ideal for the mental “collecting of images”, a visual data set in which all objects were leveled into black-and-whites at a single scale. For all their flaws and drawbacks, the UPs managed

²⁴
CAA News Today. *Announcing the 2023 Distinguished Scholar*, November 15, 2022 (May 17, 2023).

²⁵
James Oles, *Art_Latin_America. Against the Survey*, Austin, TX 2019.

to stay in business through the 1980s. But if the UPs are an index of art history as taught, they say a great deal: there were boxes of European art, parsed by period and medium: “Oriental” and Oceanic, African and Pre-Columbian, but nothing for Post-Conquest Latin America in the sales catalogues examined, whether of 1945 or 1957.²⁶ Black-and-white photographic images or color pictures clipped from magazines and mounted on gray cardboard were the standard for student study for over fifty years at many institutions in the U.S., as were the clippings files that future-thinking slide librarians and others made for student consultation. When Dana Leibsohn and Barbara Mundy introduced *Vistas. Visual Culture in Spanish America 1520–1820*, it was a transformative source (born digital, but with an early version available as DVD) for teaching the art of the colonial period;²⁷ James Oles’s comprehensive text also brought images to the fore.²⁸

V. Looking Ahead for Latin American Art History

What had been a stable experience of the primary image for well over a hundred years has been disrupted: the image is where millions of individuals start their queries to search engines. And so, the visual basis for the teaching of Latin American art history, construed most broadly, has been amplified dramatically by the dissemination of images everywhere and by every means. This is good news: Latin American art is now unconstrained by physical location. Also good news is the commitment of institutions with comprehensive Latin American collections, especially the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the Denver Art Museum, the Dallas Museum of Art, and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, to making their images available digitally. But curating these digital images into course materials is the order of the day. Which ones to teach, and which ones to provoke the undergraduate mind, unlocking further inquiry? The wide-ranging Colección Patricia Phelps de Cisneros (CPPC) provides many entries to Latin American art, as do the collections of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston. Artstor has increasingly limited value, succeeded as it has been by Google Images, but its metadata can point to little-known publications of an earlier day. Take the mural by David Siqueiros, *Tropical America*, painted in 1932, then restored by the Getty Conservation Institute in a project completed in 2012: available on Artstor are only pre-2012 photographs. There is still no one-stop shopping, even for the digital collections.

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The University Prints Complete Catalogue, Cambridge, MA 1957. Accessed through [HathiTrust](#) (May 27, 2023).

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Dana Leibsohn and Barbara E. Mundy, *Vistas. Visual Culture in Spanish America, 1520–1820*, 2015.

²⁸

James Oles, *Art and Architecture in Mexico*, London/New York 2013.

There is another impediment to studying Latin American art in the museum, and an increasing problem for Pre-Hispanic art: its problematic provenance. The nineteenth-century accounts, pointed to above, offered a way to understand an antiquity that differed from that of Europe, Asia, and Africa, and that was based on works that had survived European invasions. By and large, most Pre-Hispanic works were first seen in a direct archaeological context, and it was that specific context that provided much of their intellectual value. The systematic twentieth-century looting that was launched in the 1930s in Panama, and by 1940 in Mexico, underpinned a new commerce that has rarely been addressed in a systematic way.²⁹ This new commerce sought to erase, rather than to promote, specific context, and emphasized aesthetic values, especially in the years following World War II. As difficult as it is, and as troubling as it is, it is beyond time to acknowledge that this commerce was not a neutral exchange nor a victimless crime but rather a complex web of both individual and collaborative buyers and sellers, of corruption and crime, and most of all, a history that needs to be told. When that history is obscured or denied, our students and the public at large see a barrier, not the works, meaning, history, or power that scholars of the Pre-Hispanic past seek to bring into the twenty-first century. Good provenance work requires resources and research, a commitment that has been made by the Getty's Pre-Hispanic Art Provenance Initiative, but this can only be a beginning.³⁰

Finding the way post-pandemic to engage more individuals in front of works of art is imperative, whether in a museum or through public murals, such as those created from 1973 onward at Chicano Park, San Diego. Many institutions have kept their Latin American art in storage: as we come to the second quarter of the twenty-first century, more works need to come to the fore, whether in New Haven, Philadelphia, or Chicago. MoMA has rediscovered what is in their storerooms, and the Hispanic Society of New York City has recognized the potential of the Latin American works in their collections.³¹ The digital hand-held camera and even the selfie have unleashed an unprecedented wave of visual distribution of the museum object. But these, too, engage questions of the original – bringing the eye, for instance, closer to the daub of paint in some cases than could ever take place in reality – which draw the viewer back time and again, toggling between the image captured and the work itself. This is what happens to individuals who see a work, exploring the space between the work and themselves, experiencing an almost tactile sense in recognizing the creation of line, color,

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The Metropolitan Museum of Art has made a consistent and transparent record of provenance for every Pre-Hispanic object on its website.

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Nicknamed PHAPI; see Getty, *Pre-Hispanic Art Provenance Initiative* (May 27, 2023).

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Patrick Lenaghan, Mitchell A. Coddling, Mencia Figueroa Villota, and John O'Neill (eds.), *The Hispanic Society of America. Tesoros*, New York 2000.

and form; of sensing the power of imagery, entering into the space between subject and object. No two viewers will ever see quite the same thing, given the nuance and subtlety of the visual: it cannot be constrained by the specificity of text. Especially for Latin American visual art, it has never been more important to do so.

[Mary E. Miller](#), Sterling Professor Emeritus in History of Art at Yale University, is the Director of the Getty Research Institute, where she also leads the Pre-Hispanic Art Provenance Initiative (PHAPI), a systematic study of the twentieth-century international market for Pre-Hispanic art. A specialist in the art of ancient Mexico and the Maya, her numerous publications include *The Murals of Bonampak* (1986), *The Art of Mesoamerica* (1986, now in its sixth edition), *Maya Art and Architecture* (1999, now in a new edition with Megan O’Neil), and *The Spectacle of the Late Maya Court. Reflections on the Murals of Bonampak* (2013, with Claudia Brittenham).