WEAVING AND THE SOCIAL WORLD: 3,000 YEARS OF ANCIENT ANDEAN TEXTILES

Exhibition presents exceptionally rare examples of one of the world’s oldest and most important textile traditions
May 20–September 18, 2016
May 20, 2016, New Haven, Conn.—Weaving and the Social World: 3,000 Years of Ancient Andean Textiles celebrates the importance and beauty of ancient Andean textiles, demonstrating the wide spectrum of their designs and functions. The exhibition presents works on loan from two private collections, including tunics, mantles, and wall hangings as well as related feather, gold, and silver ornaments; weaving implements; and ceramic vessels. Characterized by graphically powerful images of deities, animals, and geometric motifs and by advanced weaving techniques, the objects on view represent one of the world’s oldest and most important textile traditions.

Exhibition Overview
Weaving was a significant artistic achievement of ancient Andean cultures in South America. Lacking written languages, societies used textiles as the primary means of transmitting images and ideas. Clothing identified a person’s gender, status, occupation, wealth, and community affiliation. Over time, textiles played an increasing role in political and religious ceremonies, particularly funerary rituals. Garments worn in life were buried with the dead, and the bodies of high-status individuals were wrapped in layers of fabrics and accompanied by cloth offerings. Textiles were also used to make votive dolls, wall hangings for shrines, clothing for figurines, bags, and other items.

Andean weavers used portable looms lashed to posts or trees with vertical warp and horizontal weft threads. A textile’s width was limited by the size of the loom, but sections could be stitched together to make larger fabrics. Textiles were produced using plain weave as well as complex techniques, such as tapestry weave and scaffold weave. Scaffold weave was unique to the Andes, while tapestry was common in Europe—although Andean tapestries incorporated finer yarns, were more tightly woven, and were finished on both sides. Additional techniques included embroidery, brocading, dye painting, tie-dye, and sewing bird feathers onto plain weaves. Threads were made from cotton native to the coast and wool from highland camellids (llamas, alpacas, and vicuñas). Andean dyers used fine organic dyes, achieving a range of more than one hundred colors. Raw materials for weaving were traded and distributed throughout...
the Andes. Finished textiles and other goods flowed among widely dispersed communities and major cities as tribute, gifts, or items of trade.

The textiles in the exhibition represent the most significant ancient Andean cultures—including the Chancay, Chavin, Chimú, Moche, Nazca, Inca, Paracas, Sihuas, and Wari societies—and they range in date from as early as 900 B.C. to the sixteenth century A.D. Bold geometric motifs are incorporated into many of the designs, including a striking Inca tunic with a black and white checkerboard pattern, accented with a section of bright red, and Nazca tunics with chevrons, stepped diamonds, and fret motifs. Supernatural beings are also common subjects: a hand-painted Chavín mantle portrays a fanged goddess; colorful Crested Moon Animals march across a feathered Chimú tunic; and the Rayed Deity, thought to represent the sun, is powerfully resplendent on Sihuas mantles.

Animals of sky, sea, and land are depicted in stylized and naturalistic forms. An extraordinary Chancay sleeved tunic portrays condors, the large soaring bird of the Andes, in three-dimensional embroidery, seen from above as if in flight. A finely embroidered Nazca mantle features a dense, repeating pattern of stylized killer whales. One wall of the exhibition galleries displays a stunning array of colorful textiles created with feathers from tropical birds of the Amazon Basin.

Exhibition co-curator Dicey Taylor explains, “Few museums have been able to present a comprehensive exhibition of complete textiles from all of the major Andean cultures. Most exhibitions have focused on particular cultures, such as the Inca, or particular types of garments. Weaving and the Social World is unique in its presentation of largely intact textiles, some in almost pristine condition, from the broad spectrum of Andean societies that rose and fell in ancient times.”

“We are immensely grateful for the opportunity to mount this exhibition, drawn from the finest collection of Andean textiles in the world,” states Laurence Kanter, Chief Curator and the Lionel Goldfrank III Curator of European Art. “From the simplest patterns to the most complex designs, every work on view is astonishing for its beauty and moving in its fragility and rarity.”

On View
May 20–September 18, 2016

Exhibition Credits
The works in this exhibition were collected by Bill and Ann Ziff and by Justin and Barbara Kerr. Exhibition organized by guest curators Peter David Joralemon, B.A. 1969, M.PHIL. 1974, and Dicey Taylor, PH.D. 1983. Made possible by the Art Gallery Exhibition and Publication Fund.
Related Programs

Exhibition Tour
Friday, June 3, 1:30 pm
Dicey Taylor, PH.D. 1983

Gallery Talk
Wednesday, June 22, 12:30 pm
“One Curator, One Work: Special Exhibitions”
Dicey Taylor

Lecture
Thursday, September 1, 5:30 pm
“Making a Masterpiece: The Royal Inca Tunic at Dumbarton Oaks”
Andrew J. Hamilton, Cotsen Postdoctoral Fellow in the Society of Fellows, and Lecturer in the Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University

The royal Inca tunic at Dumbarton Oaks has long been recognized as the single most important artifact to survive from the Inca civilization. A tremendously complex work of art, it can be analyzed to produce a richer appreciation of Inca artistic practices, aesthetics, and color theory. This investigation yields a deeper understanding of Inca art and results in a new vision of the object itself.

Visit artgallery.yale.edu/programs or call 203.432.0600 for updates and information about these programs.

All programs are free and open to the public unless otherwise noted. For more detailed programming information, visit artgallery.yale.edu/calendar.

Yale University Art Gallery
The Yale University Art Gallery, the oldest college art museum in the United States, was founded in 1832 when the patriot-artist John Trumbull gave more than 100 of his paintings to Yale College. Since then its collections have grown to more than 200,000 objects ranging in date from ancient times to the present.

General Information
The Yale University Art Gallery is located at 1111 Chapel Street, New Haven, Connecticut. Museum hours: Tuesday–Friday, 10 am–5 pm; Thursday until 8 pm (September–June); and Saturday–Sunday, 11 am–5 pm. The Gallery is closed Mondays and major holidays. Free and open to the public. For general information, please call 203.432.0600 or visit the website at www.artgallery.yale.edu.

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