

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
11 WEST 53RD STREET, NEW YORK

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Gold from the sacred Lake of Guatavita, feather mosaics preserving for 1400 years the brilliance of tropical plumage, massive sculpture which, until a few weeks ago lay half buried in jungle growth in Guatamala, will be among the many interesting objects included in the Exhibition of American Sources of Modern Art which opens to the public, at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53d Street, New York, on Wednesday, May 10th, and which will continue on view until the end of June.

Members of the Museum will have an opportunity to see this material in a preview on Tuesday, May 9th.

In the first floor galleries of the Museum of Modern Art, while this exhibition is in progress, will be placed on view works by modern artists which suggest a relationship between antique American art and the art of today. Among the artists represented are Ben Benn, Jean Charlot, John Flannagan, Raoul Hague, Carlos Merida, Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Marion Walton, Max Weber, Harold Weston, and William Zorach.

"The purpose of the Exhibition," says Mr. Holger Cahill, in his introduction to the illustrated catalogue which, following its custom, the Museum of Modern Art will publish in connection with the show, "has been to bring together examples of the art of the ancient civilizations of America which are to be found in collections in the United States, and to show its relation to the work of modern artists. There is no intention here to insist that ancient American art is a major source of modern art. Nor is it intended to suggest that American artists should turn to it as the source of native expression. It is intended, simply, to show the high quality of ancient American art, and to indicate that its influence is present in modern art in the work of painters and sculptors some of whom have been unconscious of its influence, while others have accepted or sought it quite consciously."

Museums and private collectors have generously aided the Museum of Modern Art by lending objects for this exhibition. From the Peabody Museum of Cambridge comes a particularly fine group of Maya sculpture.

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Much of this is from the ancient city of Copan, Honduras, one

of the great cities of the Maya in the 6th century. The Head of a Maize God, included in this collection, is considered by some critics one of the finest pieces of sculpture ever produced in the Western hemisphere. Jade carvings, many of them from the sacred lake of Chichen Itza in Yucatan, are also part of the Peabody loan.

The Pennsylvania University Museum of Philadelphia has also loaned examples of the best period of Maya art. Particularly striking is the Stele No. 13, which has never before been placed on exhibition. To transport this piece of massive stone, weighing more than a ton, through the jungles of Guatemala, required about three months. From the same collection the Museum of Modern Art has borrowed carved marble vases of Uloa, Honduras, and a number of fine Maya painted vases. The painted pottery of the Maya remains today our only source of knowledge of the painting of this people. The frescoes they produced have crumbled and disappeared but in these exquisite vases the skillful draftsmanship and the color sense of the ancient painters is still preserved.

Gold ornaments and amulets have also been brought from the Pennsylvania University Museum. These are chiefly from the Chibcha and Quimbaya cultures of Peru. The work of these goldsmiths and the sumptuousness of their products filled their Spanish conquerors with wonder and envy. Among the objects which the Museum of Modern Art will display are a number dredged from the sacred lake of Quimbaya. Gold had an important part in the religious ritual of the Peruvians, great quantities of ornaments and amulets having been cast into the waters of Quimbaya as votive offerings. To the Spaniards the priest who, clothed in robes sprinkled with gold dust, performed these rites gave rise to the mythical El Dorado.

Valuable Mexican material has been secured from the American Museum of Natural History in New York, including fine pieces of Aztec and Totonac sculpture. The Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, has loaned a number of sculptures from Quirigua, notably one, in dark stone, representing the terrible god, Xipe Totec, "The flayed one" wearing the skin of a sacrificial victim. The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, have both loaned beautiful textiles.

A superb feather mosaic from Peru has been borrowed from Mr. H. A. Ellsberg of New York. Examples of this interesting and individual art are rare due to the deterioration of the materials used in the warm climate. Mr. Ellsberg's mosaic has been called, by such a notable critic as Dr. Philip Ainsworth Means, perhaps the finest extant example. Brilliantly colored feathers fastened to fabric with an

inset of the cat-demon in three separate panels compose this piece which was once part of a tunic. Mr. Ellsberg has also generously loaned some very fine Nazca textiles.

Mr. Alfred M. Tozzer of Cambridge, has loaned an interesting pottery bowl, covered with a thin coat of gold, a technique which has long puzzled archaeologists. Mrs. Dwight Morrow has loaned a fine example of Toltec sculpture. The Brummer Gallery is sending Peruvian pottery and small sculptures, including figurines made of turquoise.