

I am going to offer a few insights into the art of the Aztec culture which might be helpful to the interested observer. Since few objects exist in wood, mosaics, featherwork and textiles we have to rely on the description and inventories of early witnesses.

More however A goodly number of works in stone survived. They vary from extremely crude sculptures which are probably early works or provincial examples. The metropolitan center however produced sculptures of great sophistication and plaster power. Most of the large pieces have been found in Mexico City, prompting some scholars to postulate that Tenochtitlan was perhaps unique in commissioning such works to impress rival cities of its right to proclaim itself the new Tollan and center of the world.

stone This may be true. We may never know. We should not forget that the new Spanish City of Mexico was built in haste and many monuments too large to be destroyed lazily were simply buried or dumped into canals. Large cities in the Capital ^{periphery} were settled more slowly so that the Christian iconoclasts had more time to destroy works of Aztec idolatry. We do know that thousands of god images were destroyed in the Capital. There is pathetic evidence that when the opportunity presented itself native peoples concealed sculptures in foundations of Colonial buildings, or behind altars. Occasionally as some sculptures were reworked into Columns and other architectural elements sacred imagery was preserved on hidden surfaces. Interestingly a number of Colonial ^{conquistadors} ~~conquistadors~~ have been found with images of Tlaloc preserved on their undersides. Tlaloc was a god of foodstuffs including grain.

There are a number of works in stone in the Gentling Collection that appear to have been intentionally broken or defaced.

Mexico

before burial. Our outstanding Chichastote which weighs about 400 pounds had her skeletal face and claws hacked away before she was dumped into some land fill. Our sculpture of the head of Xipe Totec was also intentionally damaged. So apparently was our Caracal sculpture of Chicomulcoatl.

Although the Aztec have been given little credit for originality, their most sophisticated sculpture created in what some call a metropolitan style has a look all its own. It is true that one can see Toltec influence and see too a strong affinity to the sculpture of the Huastecs, whose influence extended from the East Coast to ^{through the} San Juan River to today. Some Huastec sculpture may have been influenced by Aztec and rather than the other way around.

Much of the decoration and iconography of Aztec sculpture and also pottery and book painting and gold jewelry ^{in fact} ~~has been~~ ^{has} profoundly influenced by the Mixtecs from the Valley of Oaxaca, and Otzuluca south of the Valley of Mexico. Mixtec craftsmen were brought to Tenochtitlan to produce their shields and to teach local artisans. But the Mixtecs never created monumental sculpture in stone.

Aztec art in stone from the smallest surviving examples in Onyx, shell and semi precious stones to the monumental public works is characterized by ^{intentional} simplicity in over all form and rich decoration of often quite detailed realism. The simplicity of form is deceptive. Its subtleties in fact ^{are} ~~was~~ noted and ^{highly} ~~praised~~ ^{praised} by such modern ^{sculptors} ~~artists~~ as Henry Moore, and Jacques Lipchitz.