

Los Angeles County Museum of Art

FAX

To: Stuart and Scott Gentling

From: Virginia Fields

Title:

Title: Curator, Pre-Columbian Art

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Date: 09/20/99

Pages: 4

Re: The Road to Aztlan: Art from a

CC:

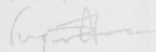
Mythic Homeland

Dear Stuart and Scott,

Enclosed is an overview of the exhibition I am developing at LACMA. I would be happy to provide more details when we meet in October. I have not booked my flight yet, but I expect to be in Dallas/Fort Worth on Friday and Saturday, Oct. 22 and 23. I may be in Dallas at the Art Museum on the 22nd, so could we meet on the 23rd? I'm very interested to see both your pre-Columbian collection and your own art work.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Virginia Fields

*for many years
settled briefly
near Tula they created the
very sacred sacred Cortez or Saint Martin*

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but the concept of the center place also travels with individuals and communities in songs, myth, and art.

Connectivity between Mexico and the Southwest is revealed in the physical and philosophical dimensions of maize agriculture and rain ceremonialism, color-directional symbolism, twin culture heroes, a feathered or horned serpent/rain deity, and various versions of a ballgame played on specially built courts.

The circulation of goods and ideas initiated a new kind of connectivity among a network of cosmological centers. The exhibition will highlight regional centers within their chronological and geographical contexts as they defined themselves as sacred centers and where the evidence of cultural exchange was most visible. These regional centers are large polities, such as Casas Grandes in northern Mexico, or clusters of settlements, such as Chaco Canyon and the Phoenix Basin Hohokam.

In the second section, themes of convergence and negotiation reflect efforts of local populations to deal with the impact of the Spanish on the region. The legendary aspect of the Southwest took on new meanings in the sixteenth century beginning in 1539 with the expedition of Fray Marcos de Niza, whose guide, Esteban, reported a golden city named Cibola. Despite this disruption of the sense of the center, throughout Mexico and the Southwest there were greater and lesser degrees of persistence of native traditions through themes and forms. Material and spiritual culture during this period reflects a dynamic relationship of interaction and adjustment.

Issues of cultural adjustment and exchange are illustrated by continuities reflecting the ability of native peoples to negotiate cultural identity in the face of disruption. In the second section, the same cultural groups that were united in the first section by other shared categories are now linked by colonialism and the fashioning of new cultural identities.

The third section of the exhibition opens with the Southwest unified by its response to political and cultural policies of the United States; in Mexico the concern is with the forging of a distinct national identity. Economic, social, and cultural exchanges continued throughout this period despite the imposition of an international border. Themes illustrated in this section include the persistence and revival of native cultural practices in the Southwest; the manner in which the first Mexican Americans and those who followed in waves of migration dealt with cultural identity; and the manner in which contemporary Mexicans deal with the pre-Columbian and colonial past. One concern to the Chicano civil rights movement was the forging of a historic sense of cultural identity. The Chicano community utilized the symbol of Aztlán as the single most distinguished metaphor for activism. As a Chicano symbol, Aztlán represents the geographic region known as the American Southwest, a spiritual homeland rooted in a sacred landscape imbued with the power of an indigenous spirituality that forms the basis for Chicano identity.

Intensive Jule

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In Mexico, the ideology of the revolution, expressed in the Mexican school, sought to come to terms with the past and popular culture. The goal was to create a national identity not tied to European models. Contemporary artists, looking at the pre-Columbian and colonial past, are trying to make sense of how that national identity was formed and whether it relates to contemporary Mexico. In brief, the themes of the third section revolve around a sense of place and the dynamic relationship to traditions of the past, and the concern about what that means today. Contemporary native, Chicano, and Mexican art deals with a sense of place and with narratives of dispersion and belonging.