



CAPTURING **THE SUN**

Master Craftsmen of Ancient Mesoamerica



ART FOR ETERNITY

CAPTURING THE SUN

The allure of gold adornments is universal and eternal. Gold possesses a power that captures the eye with even the slightest glimmer. Gold is magical in that it is inert and therefore never oxidizes, remaining lustrous and beautiful throughout time.

It must have been thrilling for indigenous Mesoamerican people to come upon this precious, magical metal in riverbeds, and in veins exposed in the soil. Similar to the contemporary world, they were concerned with social status; the function of their adornments was to indicate wealth and an elevated position in society, as well as having religious significance. Rulers wore gold crowns and were buried in gold masks. Priests used gold utensils and dressed in clothing laced with gold. The elite classes adorned themselves with gold and silver ornamentation that could be seen at a distance, displaying their status through opulence, asserting their divine authority to make the transformation to the next world, when their time came.

There were three major gold-producing centers in the New World. The first was in Peru, which is the earliest site containing evidence of gold use. Splendid first millennium BCE hammered gold plaques from the Chavín de Huantar Horizon (900 to 200 BCE) reveal complex mythological iconography. The Moche (Mochica) were very competent metalsmiths as well. They were the first to develop the technique of lost wax casting and cultivate the use of alloys, which allowed them to master three-dimensional forms.

The second established gold-producing center extended from Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela and included Panama and Costa Rica. Here many different cultures developed, each with their own distinct style. However, they shared similarities in taking forms from nature, casting birds, alligators, frogs, and other animals, as well as geometric forms. In Colombia, the earliest goldworkers were from Calima, in the western part of the country near the Rio Cauca, and were most likely influenced by the Moche. The Muisca occupied an area in the central highlands (modern day Bogotá) and were relatively isolated, allowing them to develop an independent style of abstract “stick” figures, known as tunjos.

The Tairona had a distinct goldworking tradition and mastered an extremely fine wire braiding technique. They are famous for constructing large gold warrior figures with elaborate plumage. Costa Rican and Panamanian gold art objects were extremely similar in style due to proximity and trade. Sometimes these finely detailed zoomorphic objects are referred to by historians as the “International Style” because they look so alike it is unclear from which artistic region they emerged.

The last gold-producing center with a distinctive style was in Mexico, during the Postclassic period. A few examples of Toltec Maya gold have been found, in the sacred cenote of Chichén Itzá. The Maya had limited access to precious metals such as gold, as it needed to be imported from distant regions, so Mayan gold objects are among the rarest. Later, the Aztec and Mixtec peoples established trade routes for the precious metals and were enormously talented at producing delicate jewel castings.

In this catalogue you will see a few fine examples of silver work. Unlike today, silver was scarce in antiquity, as it had to be mined. Therefore, it had a higher value— perhaps higher than gold. Whereas gold was equated with the sun, silver was symbolic of the moon and water’s regenerative properties.

It was devastating to pre-Columbian cultures when the conquistadors and colonial rulers looted as much gold and silver as they could and melted it down to send back to Europe. No one knows how many masterful works of art were destroyed. It will remain one of history’s great mysteries and tragedies. Pre-Columbian gold and silver artifacts are rare in today’s marketplace. We are lucky to have a small percentage of these precious artifacts surviving today.

The technical mastery required to produce such sophisticated artifacts in gold and silver is worthy of deep investigation. Ancient pre-Columbian master craftsmen were as skilled at lost-wax casting, hammering, repoussé work, depletion gilding, and incising as any other cultures at the time, or since. The timelessness, beauty and ingenuity of these objects is as evident and relevant today as it was in ancient times.



1. COSTA RICAN GOLD AVIAN BIRD PENDANT

ca. 600 to 800 CE

A raptorial bird pulling the braided body of a double-headed serpent up to its beak with two heads clasped in its talons. The raptor has a tapered beak, scrollwork at the ears, and flanges extending straight from the sides of the head and tail feathers. A loop hole for suspension behind.

Size: 3¾ inches H; 75 grams.
Ex Sotheby’s, New York

2. COSTA RICAN
GOLD AVIAN
BIRD PENDANT

ca. 400 to 800 CE

Cast with splayed wings,
loop hole for suspension,
hook nose, and scrolliate
headdress.

Size: 4¾ inches H;
80 grams.
Ex Sotheby's, New
York; Ex Jerrie Cobb
Foundation



Side view



3. COSTA RICAN GOLD
ZOOMORPHIC BIRD PENDANT

ca. 800 to 1200 CE

A gold and copper alloy bird-man hybrid deity pendant
depicted with long bird wings, arms, and paddle-type
feet. Large round beaded eyes, spiral ornaments with side
crests, and large hooked beak.

Suspension loop on the back of neck.
Size: 3¾ inches H x 3¾ inches L; 49.2 grams.
Ex Cora & Laurence C Witten II collection, Florida, #CR279



4. INTERNATIONAL STYLE GOLD PECTORAL

Possibly Colombia, ca. 600 to 800 CE

A large and heavy circular device with two small attachment holes near the raised hub center and pie crust motif around the exterior.

Size: 6 7/8 inches D; 130 grams.
Ex private American collection

5. TAIRONA ROCK CRYSTAL BEAD AND GOLD NOSE ORNAMENT NECKLACE

Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia ca. 800 to 1200 CE

Beautiful polished translucent barrel shape quartz beads with 14 gold balls interspersed and central bat wing heavy gold nose ornament as pendant.

Size of pendant 5 3/4 inches W; necklace is 18 inches L.
Restrung and wearable with modern closure.
Ex Jerrie Cobb Foundation; Sotheby's New York





6. CALIMA GOLD AND MOCHE TURQUOISE STONE BEAD NECKLACE

Colombia and Peru, Ca. 400 to 1000 CE

Balanced composition of gold spheres, stylized faces and a central bird with openwork fantail interspersed with ancient natural blue stones.

Size: 20 inches L. Restrung and wearable with modern closure.
Ex Jean-Eugene Lions collection, Geneva, Switzerland

7. MASSIVE TAIRONA GOLD NOSE RING

Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia, ca. 1000 to 1500 CE

Curved shape, high-karat yellow gold nose ornament with large capped termini and red cinnabar pigment.

Size: 1¾ inches W; 55.1 grams.
Ex Poway, California private collection



8. IMPRESSIVE
QUIMBAYA GOLD
PENDANT OF A
LORD IN A TRANCE

Colombia, Gulf of Urubá,
ca. 500 to 1000 CE

Cast wearing a crown, elaborate
nose ornament, and necklace.
An ancient repair was made
to the lower left knee. The
Urubá region is located on
the Colombian/Panamanian
border and was influenced by
the Quimbaya people with later
influences from the Sinú.

Size: 6¾ inches H; 91.4 grams.
Ex New York private collection



9. QUIMBAYA GOLD FIGURAL PENDANT
& QUARTZ BEAD NECKLACE

Colombia, ca. 500 to 1000 CE

A high-karat solid standing human figure with a bird on his head
as a central pendant. The strand with gold and stone native beads.
This would have been worn by the elite class, quite possibly even
a shaman as the iconography suggests. Compare with similar
example in *Gold of El Dorado*, W. Bray, figure 404, p. 198.

Size of figure: 1¾ inches H; 24 grams.
Necklace: 18 inches L, wearable and with a modern closure.
Ex private New York collection





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10. QUIMBAYA TRIANGULAR GOLD NOSE ORNAMENT

Colombia, ca. 500 to 1000 CE

Hammered curved flattened form and with raised and scrolliate designs.

Size: 5¾ inches W; 15.4 grams.
Ex private collection of J.H.,
Poway, California



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11. QUIMBAYA CRESCENT SHAPE GOLD NOSE RING

Colombia, ca. 500 to 1000 CE

A hammered gold nose ring with a modern pin affixed to the back.

Size: 2½ inches W; 20.2 grams.
Ex Harmer Rooke, Ex Jerrie
Cobb Foundation



12. QUIMBAYA GOLD FROG PENDANT

Colombia, ca. 500 to 1000 CE

A cast yellow gold frog pendant crouching on rear legs and with paddle feet. Front legs each bear a suspension loop. Well-formed body enhanced by applied ball eyes and nostrils. The frog, easily at home in both water and land, was symbolic for fertility and rebirth.

Size: 1⅞ inches L; 22.6 grams.
Ex private American collection

13. SINÚ GOLD AVIAN
BIRD PENDANT

*Sinú River region, Colombia, ca.
800 to 1400 CE*

A beautiful bird in flight, with
hooked beak, symmetrical wings,
and tail fan. A large example
worn by the noble class, which
the iconography suggests.
Compare similar example in
Goldwork and Shamanism, page
84. by Reichel-Dolmatoff.

Size: 5 inches W x 4 1/8 inches L;
96.8 grams.
Ex private American collection



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14. SINÚ GOLD
BIRD STAFF FINIAL

Colombia, ca. 800 to 1400 CE

The alert bird stands erect
on socket with stippled head,
circular eyes, long beak,
folded wings and fan tail.

Size: 3 1/4 inches L; 49.3 grams.
Ex Poway, California private
collection



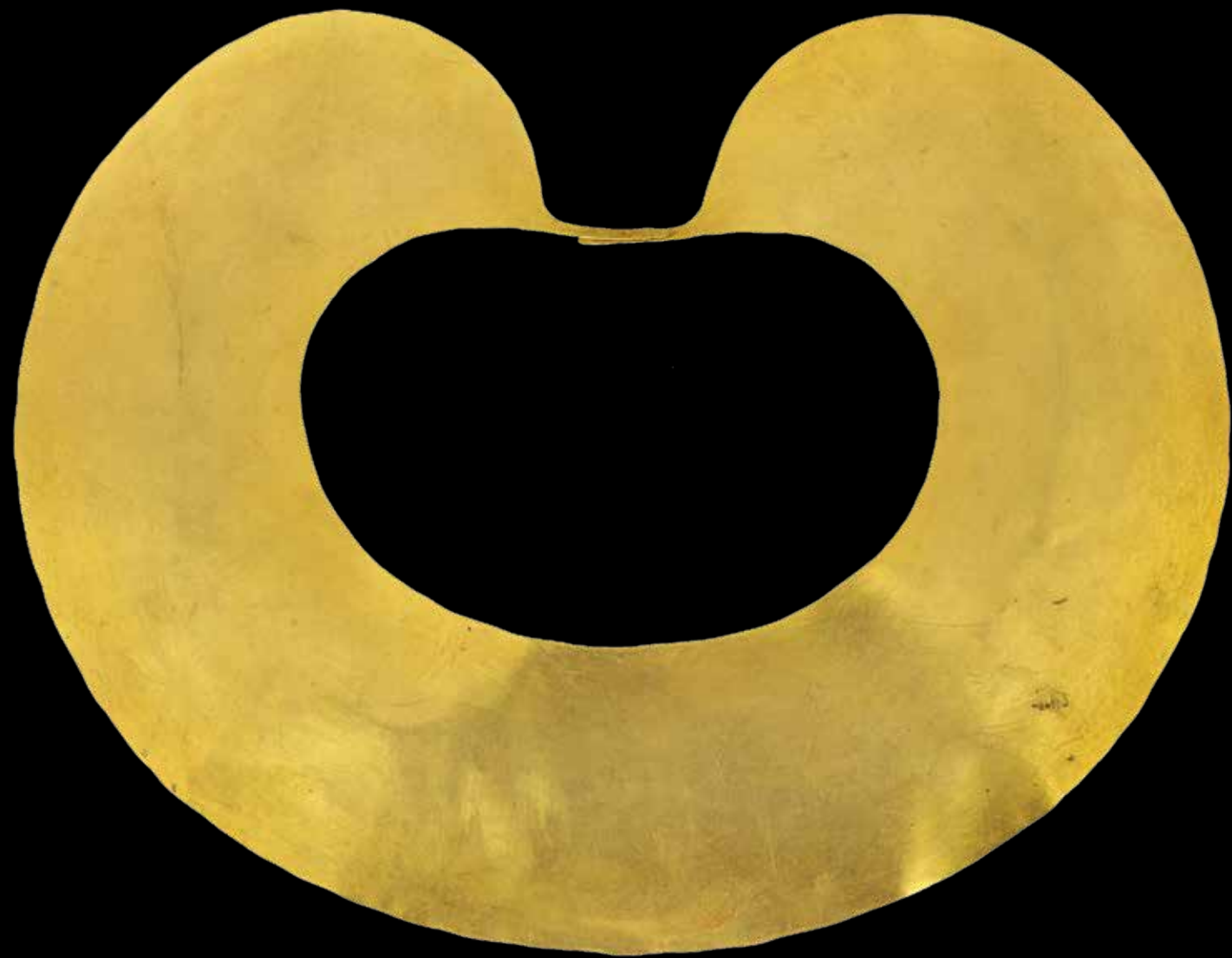
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15. SINÚ GOLD
ALLOY BIRD STAFF
FINIAL

*Colombia, Sinú river region,
ca. 800 to 1400 CE*

The bird stands erect on
socket with long beak, long
legs, slit circular eyes, wings
folded under and fan tail
with applied feathers.

Size: 3 inches H; 28.9 grams.
Ex Poway, California private
collection



16. IMPRESSIVE LARGE SINÚ GOLD NOSE/NECK ORNAMENT

Colombia, ca. 800 to 1400 CE

A sizable hammered adornment for a noble personage with a roughly heart shape and open in the middle with ample long tabs to go through the pierced septum.

Size 9½ inches W x 8 inches H; 120.1 grams.
Ex Poway, California private collection



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17. SINÚ GOLD COVERED SHELL FORM LIME CONTAINER

Colombia, ca. 800 to 1400 CE

A seashell covered and embossed in gold; the opening at the top contains crushed lime from antiquity! This should be considered drug paraphernalia, as lime was used to aid in digestion of coca leaves.

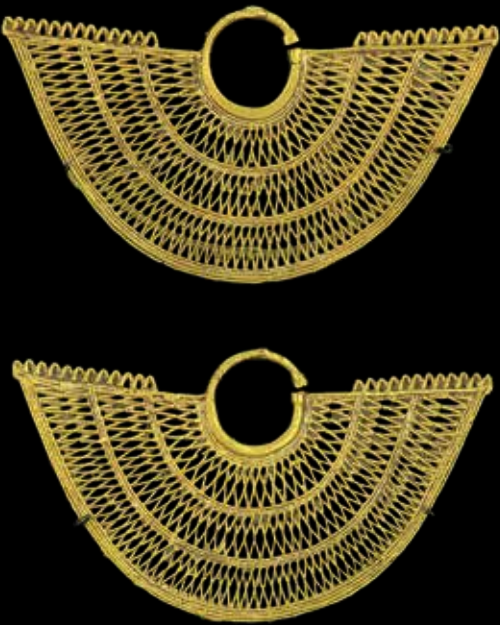
Size: 4 inches L; 53.4 grams.
Ex Poway, California private collection

18. SINÚ PAIR GOLD FILIGREE EARRINGS

Colombia, ca. 800 to 1400 CE

Made in a delicate lost-wax technique. Each a delicate semicircular open weave with a row of small idealized birds perched atop corners.

Size: each 3 inches W; 32.8 grams.
combined weight
Ex Poway, California private collection



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19. TOLIMA GOLD ZOOMORPHIC TRANSFORMATION FIGURE

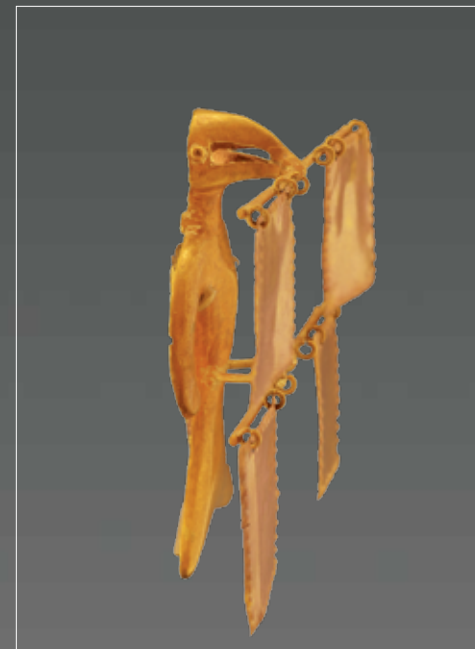
Malagana region, Colombia, ca. 300 to 500 CE

A sizable casting with multiple levels of iconography and symbolism. The main figure is a feline form with fanged mouth. Birds and other animal motifs are present at different levels as the piece is turned, illustrated right.

Size: 3½ inches L; An impressive 99 grams.
Ex Victor Cano, Sr. collection



Alternate views



Side view

20. URUBÁ GOLD BIRD PENDANT WITH DANGLERS

Colombia, Gulf of Urubá, ca. 500 to 1000 CE

The bird has its wings arched to its sides and a flared tail and four square plaques suspended on the two bars. Well-cast with evidence of the carbon core intact. Quite unique.

Size 3½ inches H; 33.6 grams.
Ex New York private collection





21. TALL MUISCA GOLD FIGURAL TUNJO

Colombia, ca. 1000 to 1400 CE

A stylized flattened figural form with characteristic wire-like limbs against the flat body silhouette. The tunjo is a classic example of the minimal and elegant style of Muisca gold work. A depiction of a figure with a staff or weapon is a typical sign of rulership or status.

Size: 4¾ inches H; 12.1 grams.
Ex Darien, Connecticut collection

22. PAIR MUISCA GOLD FIGURAL TUNJOS

Colombia, ca. 1000 to 1400 CE

Two individual abstract flattened figural stick forms, each holding an implement close to body.

Sizes: 2½ inches L; 6 grams &
2-1/4 inches L; 3 grams.
Ex private California collection



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23. PAIR OF GOLD NARIÑO ORNAMENTS WITH STYLIZED ANIMALS

Colombia, ca. 1000 to 1400 CE

Embossed with geometric and figural designs, quite probably depicting monkeys, pierced for suspension.

Size: 3¼ inches D; 20 grams total.
Ex Jerrie Cobb Foundation



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24. FOUR NARIÑO GOLD CIRCULAR APPLIQUÉS

Colombia, Capulí region, ca. 1000 to 1400 CE

Each disc, convex with rounded center and beaded perimeter, is pierced for suspension.

Sizes: 2¾ to 3½ inch D +
custom presentation mount.
13.6 grams to 14.2 grams each.
Ex Jerrie Cobb Foundation

**25. NARIÑO GOLD
CIRCULAR DISC WITH
HUMAN HEAD**

Colombia, ca. 1000 to 1400 CE

A heavy gold disc with human face displaying coiffure and ear ornaments, within a circular framework. Pierced for suspension.

Size: 5¼ inches D; 39 grams.
Ex J Cobb. Ex Sotheby's NY



**26. NARIÑO GOLD
CIRCULAR DISC WITH
MONKEYS**

Colombia, ca. 1000 to 1400 CE

Flat hammered gold disc with twin monkeys embossed opposite a medial line. Pierced for suspension.

Size: 4½ inches D; 34.7 grams.
Ex Jerrie Cobb Foundation



**27. NARIÑO GOLD
CIRCULAR DISC
DEPICTING A COCA
CHEWER**

Colombia, ca. 1000 to 1400 CE

A sizeable gold disc with human face displaying coiffure, ear ornaments, bulge in cheek, within a circular framework. Pierced for suspension.

Size: 3¾ inches D; 23.5 grams.
Ex Jerrie Cobb Foundation



Alternate view

**28. CALIMA GOLD
TWEEZERS**

Colombia, ca. 500 to 800 CE

The tool made of thick, hammered, high karat, yellow gold in a curved shape culminating in an ovoid tweezers head.

Size: 1¼ inches L; 9.4 grams.
Ex Poway, California collection



29. THREE MOCHE GOLD APPLIQUÉ DISCS WITH WARRIORS

North Coast Peru, ca. 400 to 600 CE

Circular pierced appliqué discs with standing figures, each holding weapons and wearing belts and headdresses and within a border with raised hubs. Each disc is pierced for attachment.

Size: each disk measures 3 inches D; total 58.8 grams.
Ex Lawrence C. Witten II, Florida collection. Acquired 1980s

30. TAIRONA GOLD ALLOY CREATURE LABRET (LIP PLUG)

Colombia, ca. 800 to 1400 CE

A cast copper and gold alloy of a lizard-like headed creature expelling a bifurcated plume. Fine filigree work and details. Loop holes for attachment.

Size: 1½ inches L; 4.9 grams.
Nice surface oxidation.
Ex Poway, California collection



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31. MOCHE GOLD APPLIQUÉ OF A DEITY HEAD

North Coast Peru, ca. 400 to 600 CE

A hollow pierced ornament in the form of a face with grimaced expression and little owls all around. Once inlaid.

Size: 1½ inches H; 7.3 grams.
Ex W Steinberg collection, London

32. PAIR OF CHIMÚ GOLD APPLIQUÉS: MUSICIANS AND ATTENDANTS

North Coast Peru, ca. 600 to 1200 CE

Two near matched annealed sheet gold ornament groups, each depicting a central figure with a headdress, tunic, earrings, and nose ring holding bells in each hand, flanked by two smaller figures with large headdresses/crowns. Cut and appliqué construction.

Size: 2 inches W x 2 inches H.
Ex Darien, Connecticut private collection



33. CHIMÚ DISC SHAPE OPENWORK GOLD EAR ORNAMENT

North Coast Peru, ca. 600 to 1200 CE

A large round pendant depicting a central monkey deity with large headdress, flanked by two monkeys with staffs, top of one monkey missing.

Size: 3¼ inches D.
Ex Darien, Connecticut private collection





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34. CHIMÚ GOLD REPOUSSÉ BOWL

North Coast Peru, ca. 600 to 1200 CE

Ornately decorated with four repoussé panels and borders with monkeys, birds, felines and with stippling motifs. Often these were found placed on the head, like helmets, in elite burial settings.

Size: 4 inches D; 12.6 grams.
Provenance: Jerrie Cobb Foundation; Ex Sotheby's NY

35. VICÚS GOLD TWEEZERS WITH ELEGANT SPIRALS

North Coast Peru, ca. 300 BCE to 300 CE

An elegant nose ornament of crescent shape with four wire spirals expertly soldered on each end.

Size: 6 inches W; 36.7 grams.
Ex New York private collection



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36. INCA GOLD MASK

Southern Highlands of Peru, ca. 1200 to 1300 CE

A beaten sheet of gold with protruding nose and diamond shaped eyes. There are 20 punched holes around perimeter which was used to sew the mask to a mummy bundle for the afterlife. Traces of the original cinnabar on the surface.

Size: 6½ inches H x 7¾ inches W; 54 grams.
Ex private American collection



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37. LAMBAYEQUE SILVER MASK

North Coast Peru, ca. 800 to 1100 CE

A flattened hammered mask with large slanted eyes, long ears with flares, protruding nose and with applied dangles. According to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, many Andean peoples placed masks as false faces on the mummy bundles of important individuals. Depending on the status and wealth of the deceased, the masks could be of wood, ceramic, or cloth; those of the most powerful were of gold and silver.

Size: 12 inches W x 8 inches H; 88 grams.
Ex G. Evans, Massachusetts



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38. LAMBAYEQUE SILVER
EAR SPOOLS

North Coast Peru, ca. 800 to 1100 CE

Matched pair of large silver ear spools, each decorated in relief with a stylized spider with a small bird in its stomach.

Size: 2¼ inch D. each; 58.7 grams.
Ex Jean-Eugene Lions collection,
Geneva, Switzerland, no #913

39. INCA SILVER KERO

Peru, ca. 1200 to 1400 CE

Deep hammered wide rim vessel with head in high relief, well-defined ears and necklace, strong nose and almond-shaped eyes.

Size: 7 inches H; 120 grams.
Ex Adam Hutter, New York
collection



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40. MOCHICA COPPER MASK

Loma Negra, Peru, ca. 300 BCE to 300 CE

A well-defined facial mask with realistic features in deep repoussé. Large almond-shaped eyes, each with brow outlined and naturalistic regal protruding nose. Original surface with green cupric oxide patination.

Size: 10⅞ inches L.
Ex Sotheby's New York, 1972

Published in Alan Lapiner's *Art of the Four Quarters*.



THE MOCHE PEOPLE WERE AMONG THE MOST SKILLED AND INNOVATIVE METALSMITHS IN THE AMERICAS. THE MOCHE VALUED COPPER HIGHLY AND PLACED COPPER ITEMS IN IMPORTANT BURIALS AS EVIDENCED IN RECENTLY EXCAVATED TOMBS AT THE SITE OF SIPÁN."

—Heidi King
The Spirit of Ancient Peru



41. VICÚS SILVER CAT HEAD ORNAMENT

Peru, ca. 100 BCE to 400 CE

A thick sheet of copper gold alloy in the form of a feline face maskette depicted with rounded perked ears, round low-relief eyes and nose with perforated nostrils, open toothy mouth.

Four perforations around the outer rim for attachment.
Size: 4 inches H x 3⅞ inches W.
Ex New York collection, acquired in the 1970s



42. MOCHE COPPER JAGUAR MASKETTE

Loma Negra, Peru, Early to Middle Moche, ca. 300 BCE to 300 CE

A hammered maskette, probably a center piece for a diadem or headdress, depicting a jaguar with rounded perked ears, shell inset teeth and eyes.

Size: 1⅞ inches H.
Ex Blum Antiques, New York, acquired in the 1980s

COLOMBIA & ECUADOR

Major Pre-Columbian Sites



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PERU, BOLIVIA & CHILE

Major Pre-Columbian Sites



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