VISIONS OF EMPIRE: Picturing the Conquest in Colonial Mexico
Visions of Empire:
Picturing the Conquest in Colonial Mexico

Margaret A. Jackson and Rebecca P. Brienen, eds.

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Visions of Empire: Picturing the Conquest in Colonial Mexico.
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Cover illustration:
The Conquest of Tenochtitlan/ La caída de Tenochtitlan
The Conquest of Mexico, No. 7
Mexico, second half of seventeenth century
Oil on canvas, 48" x 78"
From the collection of the Jay I. Kislak Foundation
CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ............................................................................................................. 5

Jay I. Kislak Foundation, Director’s Statement ................................................................. 7

VISIONS OF EMPIRE: Picturing the Conquest in Colonial Mexico .......................... 9
   The Aztecs and Tenochtitlan on the Eve of Conquest .................................................. 13
      by Traci Ardren, Ph.D.
   Invasion and Conquest in Mexico ................................................................................. 19
      by Martha Few, Ph.D.
   The Image of the “Indian” in Early Modern Europe and Colonial Mexico ............. 29
      by Rebecca P. Brienen, Ph.D.
   Postscript: Reflections on the Conquest of Mexico ...................................................... 37
      by Margaret A. Jackson, Ph.D.

Exhibit Catalog ............................................................................................................... 39
   Conquest Paintings No. 1-8 (Color Plates) ................................................................. 41
   Conquest Paintings No. 1-8 (Descriptions) ............................................................... 57
   Catalog No. 1-22 .......................................................................................................... 73

Select Bibliography ......................................................................................................... 99
Painting 1. The Entrance of Cortés into Tabasco / La Entrada de Cortés en Tabasco.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The exhibition Visions of Empire: Picturing the Conquest in Colonial Mexico provides, for the first time in the United States, a venue for a group of important historical paintings documenting the conquest of a new territory—the Americas. This exhibition, which also includes selected Aztec artworks, illustrates the presence of a culturally rich pre-conquest society. It was the mixture of European and native cultures that ultimately created the culture we now know as Mexican.

The exhibition would not have been possible without the generosity of Mr. and Mrs. Jay I. Kislak and the Jay I. Kislak Foundation, whose paintings of the Conquest are the centerpiece of this exhibit. In addition to these works, the Foundation has also lent a number of important ancient American and colonial artifacts to complement the paintings and provide a historical context. Arthur Dunkelman and his staff at the Kislak Foundation have steadfastly worked with the University and the Museum to present the finest scholarly exhibition possible. My deepest thanks go to all of them.

Organizing an exhibition of any scope is never an easy undertaking. I would like to draw attention to Margaret Jackson, assistant professor in art and art history at the University of Miami and curator of ancient American art at the Lowe Art Museum, for her leadership in putting this exhibition together. Dr. Jackson was assisted in this project by her co-curators and University of Miami colleagues, Traci Ardren, Rebecca Brienen, and Martha Few. A small group of University of Miami students also assisted in this project, including Patricia Garcia-Velez, M. Katherine Morales, Nicole Smith, and Jonathan Twiggar. Translations from the Spanish were made by Marten Brienen, Patricia Garcia-Velez, and Carlos Antonio Ferrer. I also would like to thank Perri Lee Roberts, vice provost for undergraduate affairs, who worked tirelessly coordi-
nating the many details that such an interdisciplinary and interdepartmental project generates.

The exhibition is accompanied by a scholarly symposium at the University of Miami, March 22-23, 2003, dedicated to an interdisciplinary investigation of the Conquest and images of this momentous event. This exhibition and symposium have been made possible by the financial support of the University of Miami and the Jay I. Kislak Foundation.

Brian A. Dursum  
*Director and Chief Curator*  
Lowe Art Museum  
University of Miami

*Catalog 16.* Autograph letter from King Philip II of Spain to Archbishop Pedro de Contreras.
The Conquest of Mexico is a pivotal moment in history, yet few people of the United States recognize the year 1521 the way they know 1492 or 1776. Consider how remarkable it is that it took less than thirty years for the Spanish—just a few thousand individuals—to reach the Americas, fan out through the Caribbean and North, Central, and South America, and defeat cultures that had flourished for centuries. The year 1521 marks a critical time in the history of the Americas, when the balance of power shifted from the indigenous Aztec people of Mesoamerica to the invading Europeans from Spain. The reverberations continue to be felt today, nearly five hundred years later.

In late 1999 the Jay I. Kislak Foundation was fortunate to have the opportunity to acquire the Conquest of Mexico series of paintings. These eight large works, created in Mexico in the second half of the seventeenth century, are considered by many art historians to be among the most important examples of Mexican colonial art.

The paintings reveal two distinct eras in history—not only 1521, but also the period about 150 years later when the paintings were made. The school of artists who created them worked in Mexico, but they were also deeply influenced by baroque art from Europe. As the works show, well before 1700, the Spaniards’ arrival and conquest had already become part of the historic lore of the New World.

The Kislak Foundation is pleased to join with the University of Miami in presenting these paintings in their first public museum exhibition in more than fifty years. Prior to our acquisition, the paintings were in the possession of Britain’s Cholmley family for more than three centuries. We are particularly pleased that this exhibition could take place in our home community. As a
Miami-based cultural institution, the Kislak Foundation has a strong focus on the people of our region. Our mission is to foster greater understanding of the cultures and history of the Americas, with particular emphasis on Florida, the Caribbean, and Mesoamerica.

We acknowledge the efforts of the University’s Lowe Art Museum in presenting these works and members of the University’s faculty in bringing together scholars of excellence for a symposium, “Invasion and Transformation: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Images of the Conquest of Mexico,” which explores the paintings and their historical context and significance. Working with our University of Miami colleagues on this project has enabled us to share these important artworks and the events they portray.

Arthur Dunkelman  
*Director and Curator*  
Jay I. Kislak Foundation

*Catalog 7.* Tlaloc Priest.
It is with pleasure that we introduce Visions of Empire: Picturing the Conquest in Colonial Mexico. This exhibition features a series of eight seventeenth-century paintings depicting the Conquest of Mexico from the collection of the Jay I. Kislak Foundation. These paintings are complemented by selected artworks related to Aztec and colonial Mexico.

The Kislak paintings vividly recreate events surrounding the sixteenth-century Conquest of Mexico, visualizing key historical figures whose stories continue to fascinate us today. Who, for example, has not heard of the ill-fated Aztec emperor, Moctezuma, or the brazen conquistador, Hernán Cortés? The story of the Conquest has been told by many people in many different ways since the sixteenth century. These paintings depict a colonial Mexican vision of the Aztec empire and the glory of the Spanish empire that conquered it. The Kislak Conquest of Mexico paintings allow us to enter into this complicated world of stories and legends, providing the modern viewer with a rare opportunity to reflect on the events pictured, the people involved, and the series of historical periods they intersect.

The paintings present eight epic moments from the Conquest story, including the first meeting of Moctezuma and Cortés and the siege of Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec empire. The viewer is drawn into the early sixteenth century, to the period between 1519 and 1521 during which Cortés, his soldiers, and their indigenous Mexican allies conquered the Aztec empire. The dignity accorded to Moctezuma and his warriors in these paintings and the careful depiction of Tenochtitlan remind the viewer that the Aztec empire, with its highly sophisticated social
and religious structures, had a long and noble history predating the events depicted in these paintings. Nonetheless, these works were not painted until the second half of the seventeenth century, more than 150 years after the events they depict. The artists of these works could have looked to a number of Spanish writers on the Conquest for inspiration, including Francisco López de Gómara, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, and Antonio de Solís. Although the quality of the paintings and the artists’ attention to details suggest a high degree of accuracy, the story told in these works is an idealized version consistent with the politics and empire building of the second half of the seventeenth century.

This exhibition addresses three main historical periods—the culture of Mexico before European contact, the time of the Conquest itself, and the later colonial period in which the paintings were created. A small but fine selection of pre-Hispanic sculpture at the beginning of the exhibit highlights the skill of Central Mexican artists and allows us to introduce the complex world of Aztec religion and society on the eve of the Conquest. The sculpture, books and manuscripts included here were selected because each refers to the larger event of the Conquest while simultaneously informing our understanding of a particular aspect of this encounter and the colonial period that followed it.

A copy of Solís’ 1684 Historia de la Conquista de México has been included in the exhibit because it was the most influential history of the Conquest published in the seventeenth century. Solís’ eloquent writing is credited with reinvigorating interest in the Conquest as an artistic and literary subject. The Kislak Conquest series has not been firmly dated, so we cannot know for certain whether Solís’ work was known by the artists and patrons of these works in New Spain. Additional printed works in the exhibit include Franciscan Alonso de Molina’s dictionary of indigenous language, which was an essential tool in the efforts to convert the native Mexicans to Christianity during the early colonial period. Other missionaries, such as Jesuit Juan de Tovar, commissioned images of the indigenous societies they encountered, providing in some cases the only ethnographic descriptions of local peoples. A small selection of images from a nineteenth-century copy of Tovar’s celebrated manu-
script provides a backdrop for the pre-Hispanic sculpture in the exhibit.

Perhaps more than any other motivation, the Conquest was colored by economics. This exhibit includes various letters from several of the key participants, including Cortés and King Philip II of Spain, which make it clear that the disposition of wealth and territory and the endless pursuit of gold were always primary concerns. Other illustrative materials include maps, such as the Cortés Map of Tenochtitlan and the world map from the Novus Orbis Regionum (1532). These maps defined the new territory at both the local level and in relationship to the larger world. Other maps, such as the Techialoyan Map of San Juan Tlacayuca, display the differences between European and indigenous cartographic conventions while demonstrating that both groups sought to express the world in spatial as well as social terms.

The Conquest was not one defining moment, or even a series of moments, as the paintings might lead one to think. It was actually an ongoing process of colonization that lasted centuries. The native peoples under the control of what we now call the Aztec empire were actually an extraordinarily diverse group. The Spanish victory was made possible by the active support of an estimated thirty thousand Tlaxcalan warriors, sworn enemies of the Tenochtitlan Mexica. Similarly, the devastating effects of European disease, to which the Americans had no natural resistance, cannot be overestimated. The passage of time and the works of art tend to cloud these details, reducing the struggle to legend.

This catalog includes a series of short essays written by the primary organizers of the exhibition—Traci Ardren, Rebecca Brienen, Martha Few, and Margaret Jackson. Complementing the catalog entries on the paintings and other objects in the exhibition, these essays address Aztec society and culture, the Conquest and colonial period, and various views of the Americas and Mexico as expressed in images. Catalog descriptions have been written by all four organizers, as indicated by their initials. Entries have also been contributed by Arthur Dunkelman and Patricia Garcia-Velez.

Margaret A. Jackson, Ph.D.
University of Miami
Catalog 13. Map of Temixtitan (Tenochtitlan), from Hernán Cortés, Praeclara Ferdinandi Cortéssi de Nova maris Oceani Hyspania Narratio (The Clear Narration by Hernán Cortés about the New Spain of the Atlantic Ocean)
The Aztecs and Tenochtitlan on the Eve of Conquest

Traci Ardren, Ph.D.

The Kislak Conquest of Mexico paintings depict a tumultuous series of battles and encounters between the invading armies of Spain, led by Hernán Cortés and his captains, and the indigenous Mexicans they encountered during their journey from the Gulf of Mexico to the Aztec capital city of Tenochtitlan. In these paintings, the indigenous combatants are generally romanticized and homogenized as great warriors and worthy foes or allies of Cortés and his men. Although the culture groups of the Gulf Coast, Tlaxcala, and Central Mexico were separate entities, the paintings make little visual distinction between one type of “Indian” and another. It seems important, therefore, to begin with a brief introduction to the Aztec empire and its ruling people, the Mexica of Tenochtitlan, as we know them today.

The City

Daily life in Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Mexica people and heart of the Aztec empire, vibrated with the hustle and bustle of any large multicultural urban city. With a population of approximately 200,000, it covered an area slightly smaller than Classical Rome. Nearby suburbs throughout the central Valley of Mexico swelled the greater urban population to something close to twenty-five million. Everyone who lived in the valley was tied in some direct way to the machinations of the empire — whether as gold worker to the kings, professional long distance trader, schoolchild learning Mexica law and theology, or housewife bringing food to the central market for sale. The Aztec empire of the Mexica was highly structured and reached deeply into the lives of its subjects through taxation and tribute, communal religious ceremonies and performances, and an intricate system of local government and military service.

Carved out of the muddy salt beds around Lake Texcoco, Tenochtitlan’s principal avenues were wide and lined with red and white plastered houses, in which different social classes or extended families lived. The city was crosscut by wide canals,
which carried canoe traffic throughout the different sectors of the city. Three raised causeways linked the island city to suburbs on the mainland. An aqueduct brought water from the mainland to residents of the city. These are indicated (although somewhat inaccurately) in the map of the city that illustrates Cortés’ second letter of 1524 (cat. 13). In the seventh Conquest painting, *La caída de Tenochtitlan/The Fall of Tenochtitlan*, architectural details like this were drawn from secondary sources, including sixteenth-century maps and written descriptions, because the first excavations of the ancient Aztec capital did not take place until at least a hundred years after the paintings were made.

The entire infrastructure was maintained by the Mexica state administration. This island city reflected the aims and aspirations of the Mexica royalty. At the heart of Tenochtitlán were two main squares— the ceremonial center where the Templo Mayor and other important temples were located, and which today is the main square of Mexico City, and the market center of Tlatelolco, located to the north of the original settlement. Surrounding these were many neighborhoods, each with its own temples, schools, craft workshops, and local markets. The royal palaces surrounded the main ceremonial square. Their proximity underscores the close relationship between religious and political power.

**The People**

The empire was composed of many well-defined social classes, each with its own prerogatives and responsibilities. Perhaps the best known of all Aztec figures is the ill-fated ruler, Moctezuma II (Motecuhzoma Xocoyotzin), who ruled from 1502 to 1520. He was a member of the *tecuhtli*, or noble class. Aztec kings ruled by virtue of their bloodline, yet the throne did not automatically pass from father to son. When a king died, the highest-ranking council members decided who among the most appropriate heirs would become the *huey tlatoani*, or Great Speaker. This might include any of the deceased king’s legitimate sons, or even his brothers, uncles, or nephews.

The *tecuhtli* were responsible for government at both the local and state level. These individuals received a salary of sorts, derived from lands that were worked in their names, as well as clothing, food, and gifts from the king. They were exempt from taxes, and their children were entitled to attend a state run school, where they followed a program of religious studies. At the time of Spanish contact, there were large numbers of *tecuhtli*. Many warriors and religious specialists were members of this class.

The *pochtlan* were professional long-distance traders who supplied various goods from throughout the empire. *Pochtlan* traveled in large caravans with their own bodyguards; many were
quite wealthy, even though they were not of noble birth. Their caravans were often under the direct protection of the state. In return, they provided intelligence on the loyalties of subjugated territories and the movements of outsiders within the realm. They traveled as far south as the Maya world, in what is today southern Mexico and Guatemala, looking for tropical quetzal feathers, and far north to trade for turquoise. The pochteca usually recruited only from within their families, and their children were eligible for state supported religious education.

Below the pochteca in social status were the professional artisans. Specialists in all kinds of trades, many artisans were subjugated outsiders who had been relocated to Tenochtitlan from Oaxaca, the Gulf Coast, and other regions. These masters produced gold jewelry, fancy stone carving, feathered cloaks and shields, and textiles of all kinds within their households. The carved stone sculptures and skull necklace (cat. 1-10) in the exhibition are good examples of their workmanship. Artisans were paid well for this work and received their compensation in the form of food, cloth, raw materials, and sometimes slaves.

Commoners, or macehualli, were distinguished from slaves in that they had the right to work land, their children could attend school, and they had the right to vote on matters related to community affairs. Military service was mandatory for the macehualli, as was participation in communal work projects, like road and canal maintenance. Commoners throughout the empire struggled under a very high rate of taxation. Slavery might befall commoners who gambled themselves into debt, as well as criminals who plotted against the empire. Those who were simply tired of working the land could also sell themselves into slavery. Mexica law required all slaves to be clothed, fed, and housed, and all children born to slaves were born free.

The Empire

Aztec is the name we use commonly today, yet the people who ruled Tenochtitlan thought of themselves as Mexica by birth. The empire was actually a confederation of three central Mexican states dominated by the Mexica: Tenochtitlan, Texcoco, and Tlacopan. Thus when we refer to the Aztecs, we are more properly referring to the entire political state. At the time of Spanish contact, most of the twenty-five million people who lived within the central Mexican highlands spoke Nahautl, the language of the empire, but this fact belies the tremendous cultural and political diversity within the realm. The Mexica controlled perhaps four hundred different city states in and outside the Valley of Mexico, including the culturally distinct Mixtec, Zapotec, Otomí, and Totonac groups.

According to Mexica mythology, their primitive forebears lived in Aztlan (whose precise location is controversial) and
emerged from the mythical cave of Chicomoztoc in approximately A.D. 1000. After wandering for years throughout central Mexico, they arrived in roughly 1325 at the shores of Lake Texcoco, where they founded the city of Tenochtitlan. The Mexica chose the site of their city based on their belief in divine intervention. The legends state that their patron deity Huitzilopochtli had told them that on an island in Lake Texcoco, in the place where the heart of an enemy had fallen, they would see a large nopal cactus in which an eagle lived. This would mark the place where their capital city should be founded. It is said that the Templo Mayor marks the exact spot where the eagle and cactus were located. Thus, the site became sacred ground, because it marked the moment when the Mexica received sanction from their most important god. Indeed, the symbol of an eagle perched on a Nopal cactus growing from a human heart became the pre-Hispanic place glyph for Tenochtitlan, and eventually the symbol for the modern Mexican nation.

By the time the Mexica founded Tenochtitlan in 1325, they were well known by other groups in the Valley of Mexico for their military capabilities. Although they were not yet major players in the political landscape of Central Mexico, they transformed a swampy lakebed into useable land and through political manipulation soon dominated the region. Initially subordinate to the more powerful Tepanacs, in 1428 the Mexica king Itzcoatl defeated the Tepanacs. He then moved to greatly expand the land base of the Mexica by moving north into Guerrero and through the cities around the lake, eventually solidifying the Triple Alliance of Tenochtitlan with its allies at Texcoco and Tlacopan.

Succeeding kings continued the military expansionist policies, targeting the peoples and cities of the Gulf Coast, to the east, and the polities of Oaxaca to the southwest. During the process, the Aztec empire cut off and surrounded the Tlaxcalan polity, which they were unable to conquer outright. With this territorial expansion came domination, rebellion, and violent suppression, creating deep-seated anger and resentment that would one day prove their undoing. Only the ancient Tarascan state to the west of the Valley of Mexico and the Tlaxcalans to the northeast remained independent of the Triple Alliance, and the leaders of these powerful areas eventually sought revenge on the Mexica by allying themselves with the Spanish.

Religion and the Templo Mayor of Tenochtitlan

The Templo Mayor (or Main Temple) seen by Spanish eyes in 1519 was an imposing structure built in the form of a square, stepped platform pyramid. It had two staircases leading to an upper platform where two temples stood. The structure was covered with paint and plaster, and elaborated with various monu-
mental stone sculptures. Its final expansion was completed by King Ahuitzotl in 1478. The illustration of the temple in the Tovar Codex (1582-1587), fails to convey the grandeur of the architecture, which was surely the focus of Tenochtitlan’s ceremonial center (cat. 11b).

The two deities venerated at the Templo Mayor were the Aztec patron deity, Huitzilopochtli, god of war, and Tlaloc, an ancient god and patron of rain. Aztec gods were venerated through the creation of sculpture, as well as the performance of rituals involving elaborately costumed impersonators. Few representations of Huitzilopochtli survive today, although images of Tlaloc abound. The exhibition includes two images of Tlaloc, one slightly more abstract than the other (cat. 6, 7). Other Aztec gods included Quetzalcoatl, the feathered serpent, Mayahuel, goddess of Maguey, Xipe Totec, god of renewal (cat. 5), and Chicomecoatl, goddess of agriculture (cat. 8).

The Beginning of the End

Like all empires, the Aztec empire was a fragile network built on alliances and coercion. The empire inherited by Moctezuma II was large and fractious. He was known as an aggressive ruler, whose tactics engendered fear, mistrust, and even hatred among subdued peoples. During his reign, tribute demands were increased to fund constant military operations, and those demands caused further discontent among the subject populations. Exploiting this volatile situation, the Spanish under Cortés allied themselves with the traditional enemies of the Mexica as well as those who were ready for yet another rebellion.

Many of the events of the Conquest were included in illustrated books and manuscripts by indigenous artists and writers in the sixteenth century. These first-person accounts describe the terror the native population experienced in fighting new forms of warfare brought by Cortés and the sadness they felt at the destruction of Tenochtitlan. These testimonies also illuminate the ways various members the Aztec empire resisted the Conquest — through opposition to conversion, subversive violence, and the celebration of traditional rituals.

The next essay describes the Spanish side of this explosive meeting between the New World and the Old, addressing, in particular, the person of Cortés and the reasons for his capture of Tenochtitlan in 1521 and remarkable defeat of the Aztec empire.

SOURCES:
Painting 2. The Arrival of Cortés at Veracruz and the Reception by Moctezuma’s Ambassadors/ La llegada de Cortés a Veracruz y la recepción de los embajadores de Moctezuma.
Invasion and Conquest in Mexico

Martha Few, Ph.D.

The year 1492 set in motion a world-wide series of biological, military, religious, and economic invasions, encounters, and exchanges that are still being interpreted and debated by scholars today. Using this date as a beginning point, we can chronicle the dramatic history of how the cultures of Europe, Spain, and Africa joined together to create what came to be called New Spain, or Spanish colonial Mexico.

Columbus and the New World

At the time Christopher Columbus sailed west on a voyage sponsored by Queen Isabella of Castile and King Ferdinand of Aragón, the Iberian Peninsula had experienced centuries of invasion and conquest by outside groups. The Muslim occupation of Spain, which lasted from A.D. 711 to 1492, is particularly important for understanding how and why Queen Isabela and King Ferdinand undertook conquest and colonization of the Americas. The wars of the reconquista (reconquest) undertaken by Iberian Christians began almost immediately after the original Muslim occupation in A.D. 711, and spanned eight hundred years of struggle between Christians and Muslims. The long duration of the reconquest meant that Spanish Catholicism was both militant and highly intolerant of other religions, with a strong focus on conversion. The process of reconquest created a cultural legacy that joined military and religious motivations for conquest and colonization. The Spanish carried these motivations with them to the New World.

Armed with the official permission of Isabela and Ferdinand, Columbus set forth with three ships, the Niña, the Pinta, and the Santa María. From Columbus’ log, we know that once he reached the Caribbean, he charted his course in search of gold, based on recommendations made by the Indians he encountered there. The term “Indian” is based on a misconception by Columbus, who thought he had found a new route to Cathay (China) and the Indies (at that time, Southeast Asia, India, and Japan). The diverse peoples and cultures of the Americas all came to be labeled Indian, a term that became increasingly neg-
ative when applied to the New World, denoting ignorance of Christianity and a lack of civility.

On March 15, 1493, Columbus returned to Spain, where he presented Isabella and Ferdinand with gold, spun cotton, and maize, as well as several Arawak natives (an indigenous group of the Caribbean). In addition, he promised the king and queen an unlimited supply of spices and cotton, and proposed an Indian slave trade.

Cortés and the Invasion of Mexico (paintings 1–8)

Effective Spanish settlement of the New World began with the establishment of Santo Domingo on the island of Hispaniola (today divided between Haiti and the Dominican Republic). With the emergence of permanent Spanish colonial cities in the Caribbean, the development of mining and agriculture quickly followed. In the Caribbean, this primarily meant the cultivation of sugar, an exceptionally labor-intensive crop. The first African slaves were brought to Hispaniola in 1510 to work on the sugar plantations, showing the importance of African slavery to Spanish colonialism from the very beginning.

The island of Hispaniola became a staging ground for further Spanish exploration, conquest, and settlement. The Spanish first explored the surrounding islands, including Cuba. Later, they directed campaigns of conquest to the mainland and large urban centers, like Tenochtitlan, the capital of the Aztec empire. The Spanish desire to expand their colonial empire derived from their reconquest experience, but stories of wealth that emerged from other expeditions also inspired further exploration. In 1517 and 1518, for example, two small Spanish expeditions sailed to the Yucatán and along the Gulf Coast of Mexico. Both expeditions came into contact with indigenous peoples there, from whom they heard rumors of gold and the existence of large, sophisticated cities in the Mexican interior.

In 1519 the Spanish governor of Cuba, Diego de Velázquez, received royal permission to put together an expeditionary force of eleven ships and five hundred men under the command of Hernán Cortés. Thirty-four years old, Cortés already had fifteen years experience in the Caribbean. Governor Velázquez and Cortés evidently had a troubled relationship, and Velázquez was not sure he could trust Cortés. According to the writings of Bernal Díaz, one of Cortés’ foot soldiers, after he was appointed to head the expedition to Mexico, “[Cortés] began to adorn himself and be more careful of his appearance than before, and he wore a plume of feathers with a medal, and a gold chain, and a velvet cloak trimmed with knots of gold, in fact, he looked like
a gallant and courageous Captain.” Such behavior probably did not endear him to Velázquez.

Velázquez tried to remove Cortés as commander, but Cortés had already set sail. The expedition first made landfall on Cozumel, an island off the east coast of the Yucatán Peninsula, where Cortés and his men met two Spaniards who had survived a shipwreck eight years before. The more important of the two was Gerónimo de Aguilar, who had learned to speak Yucatec Maya during his years in Yucatán. Joining Cortés, Aguilar became an interpreter for the expedition.

The expedition continued sailing westward, and stopped again at a town near the mouth of the Grijalva river, in what is today the Mexican state of Tabasco (painting 1). After a skirmish, indigenous leaders offered Cortés lavish gifts, including several women. One, a woman named Malintzin (also known as Doña Marina or La Malinche), was a slave and native speaker of Nahuatl, the Mexica language, who also could speak Yucatec Maya. There is much debate about why Malintzin joined forces with the Spanish. Perhaps she saw it as a way out of slavery. Whatever her reason, she cooperated with Cortés, quickly learned Spanish, and along with Aguilar translated for the Spanish expedition. Malintzin is featured in the first three paintings of the Kislak Conquest of Mexico series (painting 1-3). It is difficult to overestimate the importance of these translators, especially Malintzin, to the success of Cortés.

On April 19, 1519, Good Friday, Cortés landed near what is today the city of Veracruz (painting 2). We know this was his first encounter with representatives of Moctezuma. The king’s emissaries presented gifts to Cortés, which included costumes of important Mexica deities composed of headdresses of precious gold and feathers, masks of turquoise, and ornaments of gold, jade, and sea shells. Cortés legitimated himself as leader of the expedition by establishing a Spanish town in Mexico, Veracruz, with Spanish laws and city officials. In doing so, Cortés was able to claim autonomy from the authority of Governor Velázquez.

The expedition then began moving inland to confront the Mexica in their city of Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec empire. Using his interpreters to his best advantage, Cortés made alliances with people who were already enemies of the Mexica. His most important allies, from the city of Tlaxcala, provided Cortés with thousands of warriors and useful information on the Mexica. Cortés and his army, some 350 Spaniards and several thousand Tlaxcalans, entered the Valley of Mexico early November 1519. Only two years later, the Aztec empire and its capital city Tenochtitlan would lie in ruins.
Tenochtitlan is estimated to have had a population of about 200,000 residents. Central Mexico was roughly the size of France, and had a pre-conquest population of approximately twenty-five million. Tenochtitlan was an impressive city with ornate architecture, roads, aqueducts, temples, and a vast city market that rivaled anything at the time in Europe. Moctezuma and other Mexica elites initially welcomed the Spanish expedition as it approached Tenochtitlan (painting 3). The Mexica housed Cortés and his men in one of the royal palaces near the center of the city. Soon thereafter, Cortés, looking for tactical advantage, decided to kidnap Moctezuma and hold him prisoner in the Spanish quarters. This bold move set in motion the events that led to the defeat of the Mexica imperial city.

The question of why Cortés and his small army were able to defeat the Mexica and destroy Tenochtitlan is unresolved. The Mexica were sophisticated and experienced in warfare, and the Spanish were vastly outnumbered. Scholars generally offer four major theories in explaining the occurrence. The first is the military experience of Cortés and his men. Cortés and other members of his force had gained important experience in the conquest of Cuba and other places in the Caribbean. They exploited the tactical advantages of their horses, armor, and weapons. Cortés’ military experience also made him sensitive to the importance of alliance building. Cooperating with enemies of the Mexica gave him more soldiers and important information about the Mexica.

A second major advantage was the presence of the translators, Gerónimo Aguilar and Malintzin. Both, but especially Malintzin, acted not only as language translators but also cultural translators, giving the Spanish a crucial edge over the Mexica, who lacked translators of their own. Third, the Mexica ruler Moctezuma responded indecisively when faced with the new threat posed by Cortés and his men. Historians disagree about why Moctezuma did not act against the Spanish while he still had time, or how the Spanish were able to take him and hold him hostage. Moctezuma was ultimately killed, reportedly after being hit on the head with a stone during an episode of public unrest and violence in the months after he was taken hostage (painting 4).

The fourth major element in the Spanish defeat of the Mexica is disease. During the final battle of conquest, the Spanish lay siege to Tenochtitlan from December 1520 to August 1521. During that time, a smallpox epidemic devastated inhabitants of the capital, causing thousands of deaths in a population already weakened by the siege. This was one of a series of smallpox epidemics that decimated indigenous populations in the Americas, beginning in 1518-1519. When smallpox first appeared in the
town of Santo Domingo, in what is now the Dominican Republic, it quickly spread across the Caribbean to the Mexican mainland and on into North and South America. Combined, these four factors left much of the imperial capital in ruins.

Spanish Histories of the Conquest

Spanish writers produced a number of different histories of the Conquest in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While these works all tell the same general story, the manner in which the narrative unfolds and the characterization of those involved varies enormously from text to text. Cortés commissioned the learned priest López de Gómara to write a history of the Conquest, one of the earliest published narratives of this event. Gómara’s La historia de las indias y conquista de Mexico (1552) is an honorific history written in an elegant literary style. This book focuses chiefly on the glory of Cortés as a great leader and Spain as a great force in transmitting Christianity to the New World. Gómara, however, never set foot on Mexican soil, and thus had no personal knowledge of the events of the Conquest.

In contrast, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, author of Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España (1632), wrote from the perspective of an eyewitness, because he had been a soldier in Cortés’ army. His narrative provides unique, down-to-earth descriptions of the events from the point of view of a man of action, not of letters. Díaz’s work, composed in the sixteenth century but not published until many years after his death, originally was intended to challenge what he considered Gómara’s over-emphasis on Cortés. At the end of the seventeenth century, removed by over 150 years from the events he described, Antonio de Solís published Historia de la Conquista de México (1684). An experienced playwright and highly educated man, Solís artfully used language to give the story a dignity that Díaz’s account lacked. This book was very popular throughout Europe and appeared in more than eighty editions between 1684 and 1800. As mentioned, in its dramatic treatment of the people and events of the Conquest, this work is closest in spirit to the Kislak paintings featured in this exhibit (cat. 21).

The Establishment of Early Spanish Colonial Authority and Power

With the completion of major wars of conquest, the Spanish crown worked to consolidate royal authority and power politically, economically, and socially in its newly acquired territories in the Americas. This was difficult, given the distance and lack
of quick communication between Spain and its colonies. Colonial Spanish America included a vast amount of physical territory, densely settled communities, and rich deposits of mineral wealth, especially gold and silver. Furthermore, the interests of Spanish colonial settlers did not necessarily reflect those of the crown, contributing to the instability of early colonial rule.

The institution of the *encomienda*, first established in the Caribbean, was imported into Mexico, where it functioned as both an economic institution and an instrument of political and social control. A reward given to Spanish colonists for services rendered to the crown, the *encomienda* consisted of the right to labor and tribute from a group of indigenous people, usually linked to specific lands. The *encomienda* supplied Spaniards with the labor needed for mining, agriculture, the production of foodstuffs and products for export to Europe.

The Catholic Church was also a major institution of the Spanish colonial state. The initial priority of the Catholic Church in New Spain was the religious conversion of the indigenous population. As developed during the reconquest in Spain, the idea was to use religion to acculturate indigenous peoples to the Spanish way of life. By becoming “good Christians,” they were indoctrinated to the Spanish colonial system.

Priests accompanied Cortés in the conquest of Tenochtitlan. Afterward, missionary friars learned indigenous languages to convert the nobility first, and then used them as an example for the rest of the community (cat. 22). A major focus of the Catholic Church, especially in the years immediately after Conquest, was the promotion of marriage, including marriages of Spanish conquistadors to daughters of indigenous elites. Cortés himself provided the dowry for Isabel Moctezuma, daughter of the ruler (cat. 18). Although these intercultural marriages became increasingly less common, the mestizo children of these unions often enjoyed high social status. For example, Don Martín Cortés, the mestizo son of Hernán Cortés and Malintzín (Doña Marina), was a page to the prince who became King Philip II, and later become a knight of the Order of Santiago.

In the years that followed the Conquest, the Spanish colonial state began to institutionalize political, religious, and economic bureaucracies of rule. Even as royal authorities attempted to impose Iberian institutions and practices to maintain their authority and power over a racially diverse and geographically far-flung empire, indigenous and African peoples, drawing on their rich cultural traditions, also influenced and shaped colonial life in New Spain.
A Colonial World

Spanish colonial political institutions became better established under the administration of the viceroy, who held the highest political power in the colonies. They were responsible for tax collection, public works, military defense, control of indigenous populations, and other matters. Local administration, such as that of Mexico City, was in the hands of the cabildo (town council), a group of elected Spanish councilmen. Spanish women and ethnic minorities, including a substantial African population, also played an important role in colonial life. Colonial art works and writings, including the Kislak Conquest of Mexico paintings and Antonio de Solís’ 1684 Historia de la Conquista de México (cat. 21), focus on the heroic and largely male perspective of history. Yet these works tell only part of the story.

Recent scholarship has uncovered the critical role that Spanish women immigrants to the New World played in the establishment of colonial society. The Spanish crown encouraged women to immigrate to the Americas from the start. Spanish women came to the Americas beginning with Columbus’ third voyage in 1493. From legal petitions written by Spanish women requesting licenses to immigrate to the Americas, scholars know that at least 16,400 Spanish women departed for Mexico between 1519 and 1600. The actual numbers were certainly higher, because this total reflects only those women who applied for a license.

Behind the crown’s promotion of female immigration was the idea that the women would provide a Christian model to inhabitants of the Americas and thus play a vital role in establishing colonial authority and power. It was thought that having Spanish women in colonial Mexico would encourage the formation of families based on Iberian models, bring stability to male conquistadors and settlers, and reduce the number of children born to indigenous and African women via forced and consensual liaisons with Spanish men. Colonial authorities also believed that women would provide examples of proper female behavior to indigenous and African women, bringing Spanish culture, language, and religion into the colonial cities.

Race and Ethnicity in New Spain

By 1560, more than 100,000 Spanish immigrants had traveled to the Americas, but they still remained a minority population. From the beginning, the major question was how Spain should administer and rule the large indigenous populations in Central Mexico. The Spanish crown needed to maintain social, political, and economic distinctions between the European colonizers
and subject native populations. The result was the Two Republics system, which divided the Spanish and indigenous populations politically, economically, and socially along racial lines. In part, the Two Republics system was designed to protect indigenous populations, because many Spanish worried about high rates of Indian mortality in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, the system was also designed to aid the Spanish in collecting indigenous tribute and labor taxes.

Many colonial cities provide examples of how the Two Republics system worked in practice. Mexico City, for example, had at the center the zócalo, or town square, in which the Spanish located the institutions and bureaucracies of colonial authority and power, such as the cathedral, the office of the Inquisition, colonial courts, and the palace of the viceroy. Wealthy Spanish residents of the city lived as close as possible to this center to demonstrate their high social status. Indigenous neighborhoods, or barrios, surrounded the Spanish core. By law, non-Indians were not allowed to live there. Indigenous barrios had certain legal rights, including the right to self-rule through the cabildo, or neighborhood government, under direction of a parish priest or Spanish political official. They also had civic obligations, however, and had to pay tribute and labor taxes to the city government.

The Two Republics system began to break down almost immediately in the sixteenth century, a process that accelerated in the seventeenth century. During this period Mexico City became a multiethnic capital city, with a wide range of social and cultural diversity. In addition to the indigenous Mexicans, peoples of African ancestry, including slaves, free blacks and mulatos (individuals of mixed African and European ancestry), played an increasingly important role. A handful of black men took part in the Conquest of Mexico under Cortés, but a more substantial African influence began with the introduction of slavery and the forced migration of millions of people from the west African coast into the Americas from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. African slavery was introduced into Mexico almost immediately after the defeat of the Mexica. Historians estimate that approximately 200,000 Africans slaves were brought to Mexico during the colonial period.

By the end of the seventeenth century, castas (mixed race peoples) made up the largest percentage of the colonial population of Mexico. Castas did not fit into the Two Republics model, because they were neither purely indigenous, nor purely Spanish. Castas had an especially strong influence in urban areas like Mexico City. The population of seventeenth-century Mexico City was further shaped by the continued decline of indigenous populations after the conquest period. By 1607, the indigenous
population in central Mexico was less that ten percent of its pre-conquest number.

With the breakdown of the Two Republics system, Spanish colonial authorities looked for new ways to reform the social hierarchy to ensure divisions between Spanish elites and the rest of society. It is within this context that the Sistema de Castas, or Caste System, emerged. The Sistema de Castas organized colonial society into a ranked series of racial and ethnic categories and created status differences between various social groups, fostering a racial ideology and functioning as a form of social control. The ranked castes were the subject of painted images, known as castas paintings, which were produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The eight paintings depicting the Conquest of Mexico that form the centerpiece of this exhibition were created at a time when the population of Spanish America was becoming increasingly diverse. During the seventeenth century, the Spanish crown tried to reinforce racial, ethnic, and emerging class divisions within colonial society. As a result, descriptions of the Conquest in seventeenth-century art and literature are important sources of information about how the various different groups were perceived. In the Kislak series, we have heroic representations of the Spanish—the noble Cortés is accompanied by the ever-faithful Malintzín, and his men wear splendid armor and sit on majestic horses. While Moctezuma is accorded a degree of respect, he and his retainers are scantily clad in feathers, sandals, and capes. To some degree, they are the savages who encounter civility and Christianity in the Spanish. The visual traditions for representing the peoples of the New World are the subject of the following essay.

SOURCES:
Crosby (1973)  Palmer (1976)
Painting 3. The Meeting of Cortés and Moctezuma / El Encuentro de Cortés y Moctezuma.
The Image of the “Indian” in Early Modern Europe and Colonial Mexico

Rebecca P. Brienen, Ph.D.

The Visions of Empire exhibition includes paintings, drawings, and prints depicting events and peoples related to Mexico and the violent European expansion into the New World in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The purpose of this essay is to draw attention to European and colonial attitudes toward the indigenous peoples of the Americas by addressing the tradition of representing Indians in works of art. While the term “Indian,” as noted elsewhere, is actually based on Columbus’ misidentification of America as part of the East Indies, it has been retained in this essay, because it accurately reflects the European point of view that indigenous Americans could be lumped together as a single group.

Many images of Indians created between 1500 and 1700 functioned as propaganda, encouraging conquest and colonization by showing indigenous peoples who appeared to need both guidance and salvation. At the same time, others used idealized images of Indians to criticize the barbarous behavior of Europeans in the New World. While the anonymous artists of the Kislak Conquest of Mexico series painted the Mexica of Tenochtitlan in a heroic manner, they did not do so in order to denigrate the Spanish. Rather these images highlight the figures of Hernán Cortés and his men as the great conquerors of a worthy race.

Early European Images of Indigenous Americans

When Columbus undertook his first voyages to the Americas, many Europeans firmly believed that Amazons, one-eyed giants, and cannibals could be found beyond the borders of the civilized world. Even Columbus was surprised that the indigenous peoples of the New World were not “human monsters, which many people expected.” The first published images of the Americas display human figures that are both entirely normal and entirely European in conception. In Columbus’ first letter describing his discoveries (De insulis inventis Epistola, Basel, 1493), two Euro-
peans present gifts to a group of naked, shy, and child-like men and women (fig. 1). In very early woodcuts like this one, ethnic difference is demonstrated only by lack of clothing.

Very soon thereafter, European artists began to develop an iconography for the generic (and stereotypical) representation of an American Indian. Requirements included nudity, except for a feather headdress and feather skirt, and men were typically portrayed with bows and arrows. The Aztecs who fall to their knees in front of Cortés and his men in this 1671 image engraved by Jacob van Meurs for Arnoldus Montanus’s *Nieuwe en Onbekende Weereld* wear this costume (fig. 2).

There is, however, no evidence that skirts made only of feathers were ever worn in Mexico, or anywhere else in the Americas. This fact did not stop artists from picturing Indians, regardless of national origin, wearing this imaginary article of clothing well into the nineteenth century. Sometimes a severed human head also became part of the iconography, because it was widely believed that all Indians were cannibals.

Among the most important images of indigenous Americans were those produced by the Flemish engraver and publisher Theodor de Bry. De Bry’s *Grands Voyages* (1590-1634), a highly successful series of accounts of travel to the Americas, established the visual parameters for representations of the Indian in the early modern period. De Bry, who was both anti-Catholic and anti-Spanish, used the medium of engraving to reinforce the Black Legend of Spanish cruelty. In the *Grands Voyages*, the Spanish are guilty of torture and unspeakable mistreatment of the Indians because of their all-consuming desire for gold, although the Indians are occasionally allowed to respond in kind (cat. 20). By depicting the Indians in a highly idealized manner with the bodies of Greco-Roman gods and goddesses, de Bry made Spanish rejection of their humanity appear all the more unacceptable.

**The European View of Mexico and its Peoples**

When the Spanish first encountered the Aztec empire, they easily recognized its sophistication. It had a large bureaucracy, extensive trade relations, cities, roads, beautiful architecture, refined material culture, highly developed religious practices, and a
Figure 2. Jacob van Meurs, Mexicans and Cortés outside of Tenochtitlan, from Arnoldus Montanus, *De Nieuwe en Onbekende Weereld of Beschryving van America*, Amsterdam, 1671. Courtesy of Special Collections, Richter Library, University of Miami.
clearly defined political structure. In addition to descriptions of the city and its peoples in the published letters of Cortés and other writers, tokens of material culture circulated in Europe in the form of Moctezuma’s gifts, which Cortés sent to Charles V of Spain in 1520. Included here were fine weapons, beautiful clothing, and expertly worked gold objects, many of which were admired for the skill and ingenuity of their craftsmanship. The splendor of the Mexica capital was praised by Cortés in his second letter of 1524 (cat. 13), and the idealized illustration of Tenochtitlan in this work later joined the pantheon of great cities of the world through its inclusion in Braun and Hogenberg’s Civitates orbis terrarum (1576) (cat. 15). But neither skilled city planning nor the artistic genius of the Aztecs exercised the greatest influence on the European imagination. Rather, it was their religion that both fascinated and repulsed Europeans. In particular, ritual human sacrifice made Cortés and others describe the inhabitants of Tenochtitlan as servants of the devil.

This negative view of indigenous religion is made clear in the frontispiece for the Grands Voyages, part IV (fig. 3). The bizarre,

Figure 3. Frontispiece, Theodor de Bry, Grands Voyages, part IV. Courtesy of the Jay I. Kislak Foundation.
winged, and wholly demonic figure that sits enthroned in a niche at the top of this image most likely was intended to represent the Mexica god Huitzilopochtli. This Aztec god of war was arguably the most important of the Aztec deities. His temple was prominently located atop the Templo Mayor in Tenochtitlan. In de Bry’s image, he is an evil-looking creature with the claws of a large cat and a giant toothed mouth in his chest. Van Meurs’ 1671 engraving of the god for Arnoldus’s Nieuwe en Onbekeende Weerld clearly borrows from this representation. Neither de Bry nor van Meurs demonstrates first-hand knowledge of Mexican representations of the god, or the specialized costume worn by his impersonators. For Europeans, Huitzilopochtli was equated with Mars, the Greco-Roman god of war, and in de Bry’s fanciful representation, he symbolizes all pagan idols worshipped by indigenous Americans.

Grands Voyages part IX (Frankfurt, 1601) is the only part of the series to address Mexico specifically, although its text is interspersed with discussions of the Peruvian Inca empire along with the Aztec empire. While one would expect illustrations of human sacrifice at the Templo Mayor to be horrific, there is a highly refined aspect to de Bry’s representation of this subject, in which the priests are dressed in elegant, flowing robes. Unlike the senseless and random cruelties of the Spaniards detailed in other volumes of the Grands Voyages, here the Aztecs take human life as part of an elaborate and respectful religious ritual. Contemporary European fascination with Mexica religion resulted in the creation of many images related to the theme of human sacrifice. The Tovar Codex, a sixteenth-century manuscript in the collection of the John Carter Brown Library, includes another image of the great temple in the center of Tenochtitlan, complete with racks displaying the skulls of victims. The Kislak collection includes a nineteenth-century copy of this image (cat. 11b), demonstrating that interest in this aspect of Aztec culture had a very long life.

Images of the doomed Aztec emperor also proved irresistible for European illustrators. Portraits of Moctezuma gave a human face to the Aztec empire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His image is reproduced in the Tovar Codex, again present in this exhibition in a somewhat bland but respectful nineteenth-century copy (cat. 11a). By the end of the sixteenth century, Moctezuma had been accorded the status of a vanquished but noble ruler. Sixteenth-century European artists produced a number of life-size paintings of Moctezuma, and it was even deemed appropriate to include his image in a French book devoted to great kings of the world, both past and present. In de Bry’s Grands Voyages, Moctezuma’s death is framed as a suicide, calling to mind classical traditions and honorable figures like Socrates.
Moctezuma and the Aztec Indians in the Kislak
Conquest of Mexico Paintings

Some scholars believe that Antonio de Solís’ Historia de la conquista de México (1684) was an important source for the Kislak Conquest of Mexico series (paintings 1-8). As noted in the catalog introduction to these works, paintings and painted screens depicting different scenes from the Conquest were produced by various workshops in colonial Mexico in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The scenes chosen for reproduction were based on the printed histories of the Conquest, including Solís’ work in addition to the history by Francisco López de Gómara, among others. A highly learned man, Solís was named official chronicler to King Charles II of Spain in 1661. Using histories of the Conquest that had already been published, Solís is known for imparting a new dignity to the narrative. Whether or not Solís was the primary source for the Kislak series, his theatrical and eloquent manner of writing closely parallels the dramatic baroque style of these seventeenth-century works of art. For Solís, Cortés was the undisputed hero of the Conquest. Although Solís had few kind words for the general population of the Aztec empire, he presents Moctezuma as a ruler on a par with contemporary European kings. In addition, Solís expresses great admiration for the orders of the Jaguar and the Eagle, the highest-ranking figures in the Mexica military.

The Kislak series highlights the figure of Cortés as the main protagonist and noble leader of his troops in their epic struggle for control of Mexico and Tenochtitlan. His armor-clad figure is present in nearly every painting, as he and his captains lead their men in successful battle. Cortés’ indigenous counterpart, the Aztec emperor Moctezuma, appears in only three of these paintings, but these works make it clear that he is an elegant and distinguished man. As mentioned in the catalog description, his golden sword, aristocratic nose, full beard, and dignified presence as pictured in The Meeting of Cortés and Moctezuma/ El Encuentro de Cortés y Moctezuma reflect contemporary European ideas about the bearing appropriate to a king. Although there was no set iconography for images of the Conquest, this same type of characterization, albeit in a much more generic form, is also present in an illustration of the same subject from the 1724 English translation of Solís (fig. 4). Nonetheless, in both the painting and the print, Moctezuma’s Indian identity is secured by his scanty dress, brown athletic body, and his feathered head-dress and skirt.

In the Kislak painting, the artist has paid special attention to the costumes of the indigenous warriors, but the image remains a mixture of ethnographic accuracy and fantasy. The feather skirts are a fabrication, and the actual clothing worn by the leader of the Aztec empire provided considerably more cover-
Figure 4. The meeting of Cortés and Moctezuma, from Antonio de Solís, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards* (1724), Courtesy of Special Collections, Richter Library, University of Miami.
The special costumes worn by the Eagle and Jaguar warriors nonetheless suggest that the artist had access to earlier representations of these groups, such as those depicted in the Tovar Codex (cat. 11c, 11d). This attention to ethnographic detail sets this series of images apart from other contemporary works of the same subject.

The emphasis on Moctezuma and the Mexica as worthy foes, as pictured in the Kislak series, is typical of many seventeenth- and eighteenth-century paintings and painted screens that depict the Conquest of Mexico. This emphasis extends to the lack of interest that images in this genre demonstrate regarding indigenous religious practices. In the Kislak series, the Templo Mayor burns in the background of La caída de Tenochtitlan/The Fall of Tenochtitlan, but no idols or human sacrifices are visible. The only blood that spills in this painting is that of the fighting armies of Cortés and Cuauhtemoc, the last Aztec emperor. In these paintings, the emphasis is on the war, not the justification for it.

Cortés’ early reports to the king regarding human sacrifice ensured royal support for the Conquest and the introduction of Christianity. Late seventeenth-century colonial Mexico was, however, a very different place from that described by Cortés. By then, Creoles had no need to demonize the Mexica in order to justify the actions of the conquistadors; the Conquest was long over, 150 years past, and the missionary work of the mendicant religious orders had proven largely successful. Members of the Creole community, native born Spanish elites, whether or not they were pure Spanish, seem to have regarded both groups as their ancestors, making this largely honorific series of images the appropriate manner of celebrating the Conquest.

SOURCES:
Honour (1979), (1975)
The legendary conflict depicted in the Kislak Conquest of Mexico paintings has had a lasting impact on world history. The manner in which subsequent generations have understood these events has, nonetheless, changed quite dramatically over time. Yet, the processes of self-identification and remembrance, two of the key forces underlying artistic production, are precisely what feed the continuing interest in the Conquest of Mexico. Those processes are dynamic, ongoing, and far from complete.

The essays presented here provide three very different points of view from which to approach the subject. Ardren supplies an introduction to the imperial city that was once the Aztec capital Tenochtitlan. Rich, sophisticated, by all accounts dazzling, this city was easily as large and magnificent as sixteenth-century European capitals. In the second essay, Few makes it clear that the reconquista in Spain forms an essential point of reference for understanding Spanish exploration and conquest of the New World. She focuses on the history of the Conquest and developments of the colonial period, during which Mexico became a vibrant, multiethnic society. Although the diversity of seventeenth-century Spanish colonial society is invisible in the Conquest paintings, it doubtless informed the culture of both the painters and the patrons of these images. In a third essay, Brienen challenges the veracity of colonial images of native peoples of the Americas. Whatever the truth may have been, the Kislak paintings of Cortés’ victory over Moctezuma and the Aztecs are dramatically romanticized versions of a subject that was deeply meaningful to its original audience.

In the years that followed the creation of these works, the Conquest continued to be an important artistic subject. Throughout the colonial period (1521-1810) and into the independence era (1810-1910), artists increasingly glorified the ancient Aztec heritage in much the same way European neoclassical artists lauded ancient Greeks and Romans. By the twentieth century, however, the imperatives of the Mexican Revolution (1910) radically changed the focus of Conquest depictions. Rejecting European visual culture, pre-Hispanic iconography was appropriated by
artists as emblematic of Mexico’s noble heritage. In works from this period, the indigenous people and places of Mexico are depicted as colorful and sympathetic, while Spaniards are generally shown as sullen, even grotesque, oppressors. Rivera’s murals at the National Palace in Mexico City (1929-1954), which include hundreds of figures and lavish images of native civilizations, exemplify these trends.

Since that time, one of the greatest challenges posed by the Mexican Revolution has been joining the region’s diverse populations into a modern nation. To foster a sense of unity and national identity, Mexican cultural institutions increasingly have sought ways of understanding the Conquest within the larger context of thirty centuries of civilization. In the process, the Conquest of Mexico—and the imposition of a colonial European regime—have come to be regarded by many as significant, but ultimately discrete, episodes within the longer sweep of history. By integrating colonial events into a larger continuum, Mexicans are provided a means by which both indigenous and European aspects of heritage are made valuable.

Every generation regards the Conquest based on its own standards. Accordingly, the event continues to be investigated and reinterpreted in the visual arts, literature, and the popular imagination. This exhibition allows us to take part in this ongoing process by encouraging viewers to question and reflect on the volatile meeting of Europe and America five centuries ago.

SOURCES:
Alarcón (1997)
Errington (1993)
O’Neill (1990)
Braun (1993)
Jay I. Kislak Foundation
Conquest of Mexico Paintings 1 – 8
Color Plates
Painting 4.
Painting 6.
Painting 8.
The events of the Conquest of Mexico were not an unusual subject for works of art produced in colonial Mexico in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Drawing on published histories, such as Antonio de Solís’ 1684 *Historia de la conquista de Mexico*, workshops produced individual representations, series of paintings, and folding screens depicting events from the Conquest. The Kislak Conquest of Mexico paintings are, nonetheless, outstanding examples in this genre of history painting because of their early date, fine condition, and the skill of the artists involved.

Painted in the second half of the seventeenth century, the Kislak series is considered the earliest of the three complete cycles of paintings of the Conquest that still exist. Beginning with *The Entrance of Hernán Cortés into Tabasco*, these images highlight the battles between the Spanish and the Mexica of the Aztec empire. The series ends with the dramatic *Conquest of Tenochtitlan* and *The Capture of Cuauhtémoc*, the last Aztec king.

The rich colors, dramatic compositions, and crowded atmosphere of the Kislak paintings owe much to the baroque vocabulary found in contemporary works of art created in Italy and Spain. Paintings of successful battles were common in European art in the early modern period. In particular, they formed an essential part of princely self-fashioning, with military victories proclaiming the authority of the ruler. The Kislak Conquest of Mexico paintings follow the traditional formula for seventeenth-century Spanish battle paintings in which large figures, often on horseback, are highlighted in the foreground, with the actual conflict occurring in the middle and backgrounds. A well-known example of this type of image is Diego Velázquez’s *Surrender of Breda* (1635), which decorated the Hall of Realms in the Buen Retiro Palace of King Philip IV (1605-1665). As is typical of such works, this painting is not limited to one moment...
from the narrative. Rather, a series of events are compressed onto a single canvas.

Scholars have suggested that the Kislak Conquest series was likely painted with a Spanish destination in mind, perhaps even the royal collection of King Charles II (1661-1700). Although the Kislak paintings never made it to Spain, inventories following the king’s death in 1700 demonstrate his interest in paintings of this subject. Images of the Conquest were also in the collections of high-ranking Spanish officials during this period. Unlike the Buen Retiro battle paintings created for Philip IV, for these later audiences the Conquest was not a contemporary event, and images of it could not portray the brilliance of Charles II and his armies. Perhaps these later aristocratic patrons simply wanted to claim a piece of the glory for themselves. Had the Kislak series joined the royal collection, as was perhaps originally intended, then the paintings could have functioned as part of the mythology surrounding the Spanish triumph in the New World. Future scholarship may illuminate contemporary fascination with this subject in Spain, which can be due only in part to the publication of Solís’s *Historia de la conquista de Mexico*.

During the seventeenth century, the subject of the Conquest held relatively little interest for writers and the wider public in Spain until the 1684 publication of Solís’ history. Solís was the official chronicler of the king, and the elegance of his work stimulated a new interest in the Conquest throughout Europe. This history, which draws upon the letters of Cortés as well as the books by Francisco López de Gómara, Antonio de Herrera, and Bernal Díaz del Castillo, was published in multiple editions. Translators throughout western Europe were eager to make the great actions of Cortés, and elegant pen of Solís available to the widest possible audience. While the Kislak paintings probably draw on a variety of written sources, in their theatricality and drama they are closest to the refined language of Solís.

The Creole population of New Spain did not, however, need to read history to be reminded of the centrality of the Conquest to their existence. Scholars believe it is most likely a member of this group, which included people of “pure” Spanish ancestry as well as those of mixed Spanish and indigenous decent, who commissioned this series of paintings, perhaps intending them as a present for the king in Spain. Although we may never know for whom these works were intended, for Creoles in Mexico at the end of the seventeenth century, both the Spanish and the Mexica of the Aztec empire had already become part of their ancestral mythology, so it was imperative to portray both groups with dignity. Through their glorification of the history of Mexico, the Conquest of Mexico paintings may have served as symbols of Creole nationalism.

R.B.
NOTE ON INSCRIPTIONS AND NUMBERS

The paintings in this cycle include inscriptions and a numbering system designed to explain to viewers both who and what they are looking at. Over the last three centuries, these texts and numbers have been worn away and are now very difficult to read. In the following entries on the paintings, we gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Michael Schreffler and Dr. John Beusterien in making transcriptions of the Spanish texts on the paintings. Unlike transcriptions reproduced in earlier catalogs, here we have attempted to preserve as much as possible the spelling and wording of the original captions, which are written in the Spanish of a semi-literate person in Mexico in the second half of the seventeenth century. For example, in the fourth painting, Moctezuma lapidado por su pueblo/ the death of Moctezuma at the hands of his own people, the caption includes a possibly unintentional slur on the Spanish. As noted by Dr. Schreffler: “cercados” was originally spelled “cerrados” (pigs).

The quotes from Solís in the catalog descriptions that follow are drawn from Thomas Townsend’s 1724 translation of this work into English.

Painting 1. The Entrance of Cortés into Tabasco / La Entrada de Cortés en Tabasco
Second half of the seventeenth century Mexico
Oil on canvas, 48" x 78"
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.001.0 1.0001

No. 1

Entran en Tabasco las nuestros por la punta de los palmares guiados de geronimo de Aguilar que hullaron entre los indios, los quales dieron sobre los espanoles. [H]acen pazes y son los primeros cristianos desta Nueva España.

Fernando Cortes – 1
Bautisase D. Marina y otras cinco – 2
Casiques de Tabasco – 3
Ciudad de Tabasco – 4
Gonzalo de Sandoval – 5
Cristobal de Olid – 6
Geronimo de Aguilar – 7
Pedro de Alvarado – 8

No. 1

Our entry into Tabasco through the point of the palms [a geographical location marked by palm trees, depicted in the middle ground on the left], led by Gerónimo de Aguilar, whom they found among the Indians that surrendered to the Spanish. They [the people of Tabasco] make peace and are the first Christians of New Spain.
Hernán Cortés began his expedition to Mexico in February 1519, departing from Cuba with more than five hundred men in eleven ships. They first sailed to the island of Cozumel, located a few miles off the eastern coast of the Yucatán Peninsula, where they had a friendly encounter with a local Maya settlement. The Maya were an important indigenous group of Yucatán and Central America, and remained independent from the Aztec empire of the Mexico. After learning of the existence of Europeans among an inland Maya group, Cortés sent men to find them. As a result, the Spaniard Gerónimo de Aguilar joined Cortés and his men. Having spent years living among the Maya, Aguilar was able to speak their language, a talent that would prove very useful as the Spanish made their way inland.

Cortés’ first major conflict with indigenous Mexicans occurred as he and his men made their way toward the city of Tabasco, located on the mainland of Mexico. Although the Spanish captured the city, the conflict continued. The Spanish were outnum-bered, but Cortés used cannons and men on horseback to great effect and eventually won the battle. According to Spanish sources, the caciques, or indigenous leaders, of Tabasco then begged Cortés for forgiveness. More importantly, they gave Cortés and his men twenty women, one of whom was Malintzín, also known as Doña Marina or La Malinche. She spoke both Nahautl, the primary language of the Aztec empire, and Maya. Along with Aguilar, she became an official translator to the Spanish, greatly aiding their ability to make allies throughout Mexico.

In the painting, the Spanish troops, most in full armor and on horseback, are engaged in a furious battle with the inhabitants of Tabasco. In contrast to the metal armor and rapiers of the Spanish, the native Mexicans wear feathered costumes and carry spears and maquilhuitl, wooden clubs inset with black, razor sharp pieces of obsidian. Although Solís describes Cortés as leading the battle on horseback, the most prominent figure in the foreground is Cristóbal de Olid, one of Cortés’ captains. Mounted on a pale horse, he rises above the confusion of the battle with his rapier held high. Other members of Cortés’ senior staff depicted here include Pedro de Alvarado and Gonzalo de Sandoval. In the background of the painting we see the baptism of Malintzín (hereafter referred to as Doña Marina) along with five other indigenous women in a small grove of trees. Cortés
appears here as a witness to this event, not as a main figure in the battle. Baptisms were a common subject in colonial painting, because Europeans typically equated conversion to Christianity with the acceptance of colonial rule.

The European-looking fortress in the deep background represents Tabasco, which is described in contemporary accounts as a heavily fortified city.

R.B. and P.G-V.

Painting 2.

The Arrival of Cortés at Veracruz and the Reception by Moctezuma’s Ambassadors/ La llegada de Cortés a Veracruz y la recepción de los embajadores de Moctezuma
Second half of the seventeenth century
Mexico
Oil on canvas, 48” x 78”
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.00 1.02.000 1

Veracruz Nº 2

Llega Cortes a la veracruz da fondo en veracruz […] ban los casiques con Enbachuda de parte del emperador Montesuma i lleban presentes de oro y mantas. Cortes los recibe despues […] por medio de los interpretes Marina y aguilar. Come con ellos y despues les hizo correr los cavallos y […].

Cortes – 1
Vernal – 2
Caciques de pre – 3
Mensajeros[?] – 4
Los q[ue] corrieron – 5
La artilleria – 6
Marina – 7
La demas gente – 8

Veracruz No. 2

Cortés arrives and anchors in Veracruz […] the caciques and their entourage go forth on behalf of the emperor, carrying gifts of gold and textiles. Cortés receives them [the gifts] after […] by means of the interpreters Marina and Aguilar. He [Cortés] eats with them after […] he made the horses run and […].
Hernán Cortés and his army began their march inland toward the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan at the coastal city of Veracruz, which Cortés founded in July 1519. Upon receiving word of Cortés’ arrival on the coast, Moctezuma, the leader of the Aztec empire, sent his ambassadors to meet the Spanish explorers. Moctezuma sent precious stones, fine cloth and featherwork, and beautifully made gold objects. Although Moctezuma may have intended his gifts to encourage the Spanish to leave Mexico, the gold only increased their desire to travel to Tenochtitlan.

Most of this painting depicts the show of military strength and prowess that Cortés ordered to impress the Mexica ambassadors. These activities take place in the middle of the painting, which is filled with galloping horses, cannon fire, and Spanish soldiers in full armor. The effect of this display of military force is demonstrated by a group of indigenous peoples on the right, who prostrate themselves. The massive ships docked in the harbor are decorated with red and white Spanish imperial flags, demonstrating a powerful European presence. The gift exchange is depicted on the left of the painting, where elaborately dressed Mexica ambassadors bring gifts to Cortés, who is seated with Doña Marina and others around a table. Unfortunately, most of Cortés’ figure, which was originally seated at the head of the table on the left, has been cut off of the painting. All that remains are his hands and his armor-clad knee.

This painting is one of only two in the series to list Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1495-1583) among those present. Díaz was a soldier on Cortés’ Mexican expedition, an eyewitness to the events depicted in the paintings. His history of the Conquest, Historia verdadera de la conquista de la Nueva España, (The True History of the Conquest of New Spain) was written to counteract what he considered to be the over-valorization of Cortés by other authors, although it was not published until 1632. Díaz was used as a source by Solís, who nonetheless states: “he understood a Sword better than a pen.”

R.B. and P.G-V.
Painting 3.
The Meeting of Cortés and Moctezuma / El Encuentro de Cortés y Moctezuma
Second half of the seventeenth century
Mexico
Oil on canvas, 48" x 78"
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.00 1.03.000 1

Bolcan de Mexico Nº 3
Sale Cortes para [syle?] de iztapalapa donde descubre villas y ciudades en el agua y la calzada [derecha?] sale de Mexico Moctezuma arrecrierle y le present[a] una cadena que traia al cuello. Cortes le ba a echar los brasos y le detiene por no usarse entre ellos […] hacer] las andas 4 Reyes [que] lo traen en h]ombros.

Cortes – 1
Moctezuma – 2
Ichcu – 3
Pedro de Alvarado – 4
Cristóbal de Olid – 5
The throne of Moctezuma – 6

Volcano of Mexico No. 3
Cortés leaves for […] of Iztapalapa, where he encounters towns and cities on the water and a paved roadway [to the right]. Moctezuma leaves Mexico [Tenochtitlan] to receive him and he presents him [Cortés] with a chain that he was wearing around his neck. Cortés goes to embrace him but he is held back because this is not the custom among them. Four kings [use?] the throne platform, which they carry on their shoulders.

Cortés – 1
Moctezuma – 2
Marina – 3
Pedro de Alvarado – 4
Cristóbal de Olid – 5
The throne of Moctezuma – 6

F
From Veracruz, Cortés and his men continued their journey westward toward Tenochtitlan, along the way making important allies of the Tlaxcalans, who were bitter enemies of the Mexica. The Spanish expedition traveled with their new allies through the high and rugged terrain surrounding the volcano Popocatepetl (the mountain that smokes) to reach the Valley of Mexico. After spending the night in the city of Iztapalapa, Cortés and his men marched across one of three broad causeways that connected the island city of Tenochtitlan to the mainland.

Moctezuma, leader of the Aztec empire, and Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés met for the first time outside the city on the shores of Lake Texcoco. Contemporary accounts state that Moctezuma wore rich clothing and sandals. His lords or caciques carried a canopy for him to stand under; it was decorated with green feathers, gold and silver embroidery, and precious stones. Chieftains swept the ground before him, while other dignitaries held
out royal mats so that Moctezuma’s golden sandals would not touch the earth. Keeping their heads lowered in reverence, the members of his court did not dare look Moctezuma in the face. The painting depicts Cortés’ arrival at this scene of refined theatrical spectacle. Cortés has dismounted from his horse, and he approaches Moctezuma with his arms opened in a gesture of embrace, which the Mexica leader respectfully rejects by raising his left hand. Describing Moctezuma, Solís states “his nose was aquiline…his look majestick[sic] and thoughtful.” Moctezuma’s idealized body, dignified stance, full beard, aristocratic nose, and even the golden sword he holds in his right hand, owe more to European ideas about the appropriate appearance of a king than to ethnographic accuracy. For example, the feather skirts worn by Moctezuma and his court were part of the standard iconography for depicting Indians, although this article of clothing was not worn in Mexico or anywhere else in the Americas.

Comparison with a contemporary illustration of the same event from the 1724 English translation of Solís highlights the great attention paid in the Kislak paintings to other details of dress and ornamentation, many of which are highly convincing (fig. 2.). Great attention has also been paid to the clothing of Doña Marina, who stands besides Cortés as one of the primary figures in this composition.

A small yellow dot in the sky to the left of the volcano may represent a comet that appeared in the sky over Tenochtitlan at this time. According some sources, its appearance contributed to Moctezuma’s inability to address the Spanish threat effectively, because it was interpreted as an omen of disaster.

R.B. and P.G-V.
Painting 4.
The death of Moctezuma at the hands of his own people / Moctezuma lapidado por su pueblo
Second half of the seventeenth century
Mexico
Oil on canvas, 48” x 78”
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.00 1.04.000 1

Viendose cercados los españoles dentro de las casas de Mexico, hacen asomar a Moctezuma a un terrado y desde allí los apasiguaba, pero un indio le tiro una pedrada y los demás indios lanzan unas flechasos de que murió. Pones fuego a los apesentos.

Montezuma – 1
El indio que rivo – 2
Friar Bartolome de Olmedo – 3
Bernal Diaz de Castillo – 4
Cristobal de Olid – 5
Gonzalo de Sandoval – 6
House of Moctezuma – 7

No. 4
The Spanish, finding themselves trapped in the palace in Mexico [Tenochtitlan], make Moctezuma appear on a roof terrace, and from there he quieted them, but an Indian threw a stone and the rest launched arrows from which he died. They burn the rooms [perhaps of the temple in the background].

Upon the entrance of the Spanish and their allies into Tenochtitlan, Moctezuma put the palace of Axayácatl at their disposal. The new arrivals were entertained and given tours of the city, which by all accounts was a beautiful, well-ordered place. According to Cortés’ Second Letter (Carta de Relación, published in 1522), soon thereafter Moctezuma offered himself and his people as vassals to the King of Spain; whether Moctezuma actually made such a statement is still a hotly contested issue for historians of Mexico. There is no doubt, however, that the Spanish and Tlaxacan presence in Tenochtitlan fostered a deep sense of disquiet in the Mexica population, especially when Cortés began to preach Christianity. After learning of an attack on his men left behind in Veracruz, Cortés took Moctezuma hostage. In their palace, the Spanish discovered a treasure room of gold and precious objects, which were supplemented by additional “gifts” from Moctezuma, and it seems clear
that tension also began to build among the Spanish about how they could retain this hoard of gold in light of an environment that seemed increasingly unfriendly.

The city erupted into violent struggles between the Spaniards and their allies and the Mexica after the Spanish destroyed major cult figures in the Templo Mayor, the largest and most important building in the center of Tenochtitlan’s ceremonial complex. The Spanish massacre of many Mexica nobles who were participating in a festival also did much to create a hostile environment. Although the exact date of his death is unclear, at some point during this time Moctezuma appeared in public on the upper level of the palace Axayácatl in an attempt to ease the hostility of his people. What followed is a matter of some uncertainty; rocks were thrown and Moctezuma was hit, but the severity of the wound is unknown. Spanish accounts put the blame for his death firmly on a rock-throwing Mexica warrior, while Nahautl accounts suggest that the injury was minor and that the Spanish instead killed Moctezuma in secret.

In the painting, Moctezuma appears above the palace, here depicted as a large, fortress-like structure. The Mexica leader has not yet received his fatal blow, and his facial expression suggests empathy for the Spanish as well as concern for his people. As described by Solís, his face showed “severity mix’d with lenity, which at once express’d both his anger and fear.” On the street below, the Mexica warriors swarm angrily in front of the palace. Great attention has been paid to the costumes of these figures, especially those of the jaguar and eagle warriors, the highest-ranking soldiers in the Mexica military. A Mexica man holding the fatal stone is depicted in the foreground, standing almost on the bottom edge of the canvas. The stone he clutches is about to be launched, adding tension to the scene. The billowing clouds of smoke in the background also create drama and may represent Spaniards setting fire to the idols from the Templo Mayor.

The prominence of the priest standing next to Moctezuma is both a foreshadowing of the death of Moctezuma and a reminder of the importance of Christianity and conversion in New Spain. One recent scholar has pointed out the formal similarities between this composition and images of Jesus as “Ecco Homo” (Behold the Man). Based on the Gospel of John, images of this subject show Jesus standing on a balcony, looking sorrowfully down at a jeering crowd below. As in the biblical story, in this painting Moctezuma is denied and even struck down by his own people. Moctezuma, with his compassionate expression and inevitable death, becomes a Christ-like figure.

R.B. and P.G-V.
Painting 5.
The Sad Night / La Noche Triste
Second half of the seventeenth century
Mexico
Oil on canvas, 48" x 78"
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.00 1.05.000 1

Nº 5
Sale Cortés de Mexico con los suyo[s] a las 11 de la noche que habia oscuro y lloró
binava […] los indi[os] iban sobre ellos y quitan la puente que llevaban, llenose el
foso de Alvarado de hombres, caballos y tlaxcaltecos muertos van a los remedios
donde se hacen fuertes en el Cú. Nº – 6
Fernan Cortes – 1
Cristóbal de Olí[d] – 2
Gonzalo de Sandoval – 3
Pedro de Alvarado – 4
Indios tlascaliscos – 5

No. 5
Cortés and his men leave Mexico at 11 on a dark and rainy night […] the Indians
follow them, and they remove the bridge they [the Spanish] took with them.
Alvarado’s hole [a hole in the causeway] was filled with dead men, horses and
Tlaxcalans. They go to the fortifications on the pyramid, where they regain their
strength. No. – 6.
Hernán Cortés – 1
Cristóbal de Olid – 2
Gonzalo de Sandoval – 3

Following the death of Moctezuma, and given the increasingly
difficult situation of the Spanish, who remained trapped in
the palace of Axayácatl in the center of Tenochtitlan, Cortés
determined that the time had come to leave the Mexica capital.
Midnight on July 1, 1520, was the time chosen for retreat, and
it was a rainy, misty, and inhospitable night, according to eye-
witness observer Bernal Díaz. Spotted soon after leaving their
stronghold, the Spanish and their allies were the victims of fierce
attacks by the Mexica. Although Cortés and most of the leaders
of the Spanish contingent managed to escape to the mainland on
makeshift bridges, hundreds of Spanish soldiers and thousands of
Tlaxcalans died, drowned in the lake or pierced by arrows shot by
the Mexica from their canoes. According to various accounts,
the water was clogged with corpses of both men and horses.

This dramatic nocturnal image highlights the Spanish partic-
ipants in this battle, who are portrayed as noble men on horse-
back, imparting a curious sense of heroism to what was in fact a
disastrous retreat. In the center of the painting, Cortés is seated
on a rearing horse, brandishing his sword triumphantly over the
chaos that surrounds him. In the deep background, Tenochtitlan is represented as an empty, abandoned city, oddly disconnected from the furious battle that rages in front of it. A hierarchy of scale is established in this painting, in which the Spanish are both the largest and most prominent figures. Three Spaniards on horseback dominate the foreground, riding out from the confusion and adding drama to the composition.

In addition to the loss of life on the Spanish side, undoubtedly the loss of their gold treasure also made this a “sad night.” Evidence of the gold lost or left behind can be seen scattered on the ground in the form of small rectangular bars. The treasure was never recovered.

R.B.

Painting 6.

The Battle of Otumba/ La batalla de Otumba
Second half of the seventeenth century
Mexico
Oil on canvas, 48” x 78”
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.00 1.06.0001

No. 6
Gananles el estandarte R[ea]l con que tuvieron una [calida?] batalla de que se [vieron?] los espanoles muy apretados, suceden este dia casos memorables en que se mostro al animo de Cortes y sus capitanes.

Hernán Cortés – 1
Capitan de los mexicanos en Otumba –2
Cristóbal de Olid – 3
Gonzalo de Sandoval – 4
Pedro de Alvarado – 5
Otros capitanes – 6

The Spanish capture the royal standard from them, with whom they had a [fierce] battle, in which the Spaniards found themselves in dire straits. This day, memorable events occurred in which Cortés and his men showed their bravery.

Hernán Cortés – 1
Capitan of the Mexicans in Otumba –2
Cristóbal de Olid – 3
Gonzalo de Sandoval – 4
Pedro de Alvarado – 5
Other captains – 6
After the defeat of the Spaniards during the “la noche triste,” Cortés marched the survivors away from the city in the direction of Tlaxcala. During this flight from Tenochtitlan, Cortés took his men through the valley of Otumba. Here Cuitláhuac, the new Mexica leader of the Aztec empire and a brother of Moctezuma, mounted a major battle against the invaders. The Europeans and their allies were both outnum-bered and in a weakened condition, and at the beginning of the battle the outcome did not look promising for them. With a small group of men, however, Cortés attacked the main leaders of the Mexica army. By capturing most of these men, who were easily distinguishable because of their banners and elaborate costumes, the Spanish were able to take control and win the battle. Spanish histories of the Conquest emphasize the significance of this battle as a key turning point in the fortunes of the Spanish in Mexico, who were then able to continue their journey to Tlaxcala, the home of Cortés’ most important allies. In Solís’ version of this battle, Cortés is the great commander who rallies his men with the strong but stern words: “either die or conquer.”

The left foreground of the painting focuses on the capture of the Mexica leaders. Like most of the other indigenous soldiers in this painting, these five men are dressed in elaborate costumes. The leader on the left is clearly recognizable as a jaguar warrior.

Surrounded by Spanish soldiers in armor on the left, the men face Cortés, whose wildly rearing horse threatens to trample them. Cortés holds a rapier to the chest of the man closest to him, who also clutches a rapier in his hand, presumably captured from the Spanish. The background of the painting gives way to furious fighting between the Spanish and the Mexica.

R.B.
Painting 7.

The Conquest of Tenochtitlan/ La caída de Tenochtitlan
Second half of the seventeenth century
Mexico
Oil on canvas, 48" x 78"
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.00 1.07.000 1

CONQUISTA DE MEXICO POR CORTES. N° 7.

El último combate de México por Cortés y sus hombres por las tres calzadas que van a México, por la Laguna los vergantines a quien davan cruel guerra los indios. Gana Pedro de Alvarado el alto cu de guichilobos, y pone las banderas de Su Majestad.

Fernán Cortés – 1
Carzada de San Antonio – 2
Cristóbal de Oli[d] – 3
Pedro de Alvarado – 4
Carzada de Tacuba – 5
Gonzalo de Sandoval – 6
Carzada de Guadalupe – 7
Sacerdote del idolo – 8
Guichilobos que va rogado – 9

CONQUEST OF MEXICO BY CORTÉS. No. 7.

The final battle for Mexico [Tenochtitlan] by Cortés and his men by way of the three roadways that lead to Mexico, and with the brigantines through the lagoon, which the Indians fought savagely. Pedro de Alvarado wins the pyramid of Guichilobos [Templo Mayor] and raises His Majesty’s flag.

Hernán Cortés – 1
Road of San Antón – 2
Cristóbal de Oli[d] – 3
Pedro de Alvarado – 4
Road of Tacuba – 5
Gonzalo de Sandoval – 6
Road of Guadalupe – 7
Priest of the idols – 8
Guichilobos [Huitzilopochtli] that is surrounded – 9

The battle for Tenochtitlan between the Spanish under Cortés and the Mexica under the last Aztec leader Cuauhtémoc is more properly called a siege. Beginning in May of 1521, it lasted well into August of that year. Cortés took advantage of the city’s island location by ordering the construction of a fleet of brigantines. These small, maneuverable ships for up to forty men were outfitted with cannon, and they allowed the Spanish to control the lake and blockade the city. Cortés separated his men, the vast majority of whom were indigenous allies such as the Tlaxcalans, into three armed groups led by his most highly trusted officers: Pedro de Alvarado, Cristóbal de Olid, and Gonzalo de Sandoval. During the siege Cortés ordered the complete destruction of Tenochtitlan, which had formerly been praised by many, including Cortés, for its beauty. The Mexica put up a spirited and skilled resistance to the invaders, but
months of diminished food and inadequate water, in addition to an epidemic of smallpox, meant that by August they could no longer defend the city. The surrender of the survivors, the destruction of the main temple, and the capture of Cuauhtémoc, Cuitaahau’s successor, depicted in the last painting of this series, marked both the end of the battle for Tenochtitlan and the end of Aztec empire.

The painting attempts to distill all the excitement, bloodshed, and drama of the siege into a series of key moments. Here we see Cortés in the foreground leading his Spanish armies on horseback across one of the causeways and into the city. He is shown in a confident manner, seated on a rearing horse with the baton of command held firmly in his left hand and a rapier held high in his right. The other captains also lead their troops towards the center of the city and the main temple compound. Only five brigan- tines are visible on the lake, here and there defending the Spaniards from the Mexica in canoes. The success of Cortés and his armies is already assured by the flames that emerge from the main temple and the Spanish flag that has been mounted on the roof of the shrine to Huitzilopochtli.

R.B.

Painting 8.
The Capture of Cuauhtémoc / La prisión de Cuauhtémoc
Second half of the seventeenth century
Mexico
Oil on canvas, 48” x 78”
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2000.00 1.08.000 1

Salen huyendo Guatemoc ultimo Rey de Mexico, con los suyos en canoas en que llevavan oro y plata y demas joyas. danles alcanse los vergantines. Y prendenlo a hora de visperas de S. Hipolito, con que se concluyo el cerco de Mexico en nombre de Su Majes[r]ad.

Guatemoc, Rey de Mexico – 1
Bergantín que le alcaço – 2
Canoas de oro y plata – 3
Carrisales – 4
Indios que iban huyendo – 5
Muger de Guatemoc – 6

Guatemoc [Cuauhtémoc], last king of Mexico [Tenochtitlan], flees with his men in canoes, in which they carry their gold and silver and other jewels. The brigan- tines reach them, and arrest him at the hour of the vesper of S. Hipolitus, after which the siege of Mexico was concluded in the name of his majesty.

Guatemoc [Cuauhtémoc], King of Mexico – 1
Brigantines catching up to them – 2
Canoes with gold and silver – 3
Reeds – 4
Fleeing Indians – 5
Wife of Guatemoc [Cuauhtémoc] – 6
The Mexica noble Cuauhtémoc, whose name roughly translates to swooping or falling eagle, was the eleventh and last *tlatoani* of the Aztec empire. He ruled from December 1520, following the death due to smallpox of Cuitáhuac, to August 1521, when the city fell to the Spanish. Although Cuauhtémoc was apparently quite young, he was already known as a great warrior. In preparation for the battle with Cortés and his allies, Cuauhtémoc had attempted to strengthen and renew alliances with various peoples in the empire. His inability to find reliable allies isolated the Mexica in their final battle with the Spanish. In August, after much of Tenochtitlan had already been destroyed, Cuauhtémoc was captured as he fled the city in a canoe. At this time Cuauhtémoc was delivered to Cortés, who received him with great honor. In 1525 Cuauhtémoc was executed because of reports that he was planning a rebellion against Spanish rule.

According to some histories, Cuauhtémoc fled with fifty canoes, carrying his relatives, other Mexica nobles, and especially his riches with him, and this is the version that we see depicted in this painting. Here Cuauhtémoc, who was recognized because of his feathered and jeweled finery, stands between two Spaniards, one of whom looks like Cortés (on the left), although he was not in fact present for the capture. This Spaniard stretches out his left arm to embrace the nobleman, although he also holds a rapier in his right hand. Cuauhtémoc maintains his dignified composure. Although the artist of the paintings certainly never saw the individuals depicted in this work, there is a surprising degree of attention paid to the individual features of both Cuauhtémoc and his captors.

R.B.

**SOURCES:**
Brown (1986)
Cortés (1971)
Cuadriello (1999)
Diaz (1981)
García Sáiz (1999)
Honour (1975)
Keen (1971)
Schwartz (2000)
Solís (1724)
Necklace of Skulls
A.D. 1200-1500
Mixtec, Mexico
Carved shell, Length 19”
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 1991.093.00.001

This stunning necklace is made of nineteen nearly identical skulls carved from conch shell. The deeply carved eye sockets may originally have been inlaid with hematite. The style of carving suggests that this piece was made by a Mixtec artist, some of whom lived in the capital of Tenochtitlan. Throughout the central Mexican highlands, such necklaces were worn by young nobles who entered professional schools to study religion and military arts. To viewers today, skulls represent death, but within Mexico culture the skull had numerous symbolic connotations. For example, the deity Quetzalcoatl, the lord of the winds, used the bones of the dead to create the first men and women. In Mixtec art, life-giving deities are often shown in skeletal form, a reflection of the interconnectedness of death and rebirth in Mesoamerican cultures.

T.A.

SOURCES:
These delicate ear decorations are made of shell from a spiny oyster inlaid with turquoise and mother of pearl. Earflares such as these were worn by royalty and are associated with certain deities. This pair may have arrived in Central Mexico as part of a tribute payment. Turquoise mosaic jewelry generally traveled into Mexico from the American southwest via the Sierra Madres. The turquoise used in these ornaments was one of the mostly highly desired gemstones within Mexica culture. The sky-blue color was associated with Quetzalcoatl, the lord of the winds. In addition, the Mexica war god Huitzilopochtli was sometimes called “the Turquoise Prince.”

T.A.

SOURCES:
Franch (1992)
Crystal Coyote Head
A.D. 1400-1521
Aztec, Mexico
Quartz Crystal, 2 1/2" x 2 1/2" x 4 5/8"
Lowe Art Museum, 77.324.001

The coyote, derived from the Nahuatl coyotl, is known throughout Native American lore as a sly trickster. This beautifully carved coyote head demonstrates the skill of Aztec artists in combining realistic detail with artistic stylization. The contours of the animal’s snout, brow, and curling lips give a sense of lively animation and help the viewer to identify the species. The curious spiral patterns inside the ears conform to the stylized manner of depiction characteristic of Aztec sculpture. Quartz crystal is very difficult to carve because of its hardness. It was favored by the Aztecs because of its transparency and refractive qualities. This piece has two connecting holes drilled into the backside of the coyote’s head, suggesting that it was intended to be attached to a headdress, necklace, belt, or lance. This coyote head was most likely used as part of an elaborate costume.

M.J.
Wind God Sculpture in Guise of a Bee
A.D. 1400-1521
Aztec, Mexico
Reddish-brown basalt with gray patina, Length 13" Height 7"
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 1990.046.00.0003

This sculpture is a perfect example of post-Classic Mexica art. The figure combines the typical head of Ehécatl, the god of the winds that brought nourishing rains, with a naturalistic abdomen of a bee, a common Mexica metaphor for agricultural prosperity. The head of Ehécatl is always partly covered in a mask, which often resembles a bird's beak. In this example, three tassels extend over the mask to be blown in the wind that blows from his mouth. The eyes of the figure originally may have been inlaid with jade disks. Ehécatl was one of the most important Mexica deities, and his main temple was a circular building directly in front of the Templo Mayor in Tenochtitlan. Favorable winds and rain were necessary for the agricultural foundation of the Aztec empire, and Mexica art is full of insects such as butterflies, grasshoppers, and bees. Honey was used as a sweetener, a topical medicine, and an agent for fermenting alcoholic beverages. Beekeeping was practiced extensively throughout ancient Mesoamerica, and honey and beeswax were important tribute items within the Mexica economy.

T.A.
SOURCES:
Taube (1993)
5.

Xipe-Totec Priest Wearing a Flayed Human Skin
A.D. 1400-1521
Aztec, Mexico
Painted basalt, Height 13"
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 1987.020.00.0001

This Xipe-Totec, "our lord the flayed one," is an exquisite example of Mexica stone sculpture. The surface of this sculpture retains significant amounts of red and yellow pigment. The red indicates the priest's natural skin color, and the yellow indicates the flayed human skin he wears as part of his ceremonial obligations. The priests of Xipe-Totec impersonated him by wearing a gold-dyed human skin for twenty days, or until the skin rotted away. The priest would then emerge reborn. Here the lips of the living priest can be seen under the mask of flayed facial skin. The back of the sculpture shows the elaborate knots and ties used to hold the skin in place. This figure may have worn earrings, and it is also possible that he held a staff in both clenched hands. Xipe-Totec is a fertility god, and his appearance illustrates the close association between life and death in Mexica mythology. Xipe-Totec was said to assist the earth in making her new skin every spring. Xipe-Totec was also the patron god of goldsmiths. Scholars believe this deity was integrated into the Aztec empire during the forced assimilation of peoples from the Gulf Coast.

T.A.
SOURCES:
Franch (1992)
Taube (1993)
Soustelle (1961)
6.

**Tlaloc Effigy Figure**  
A.D. 1400-1521  
Aztec, Mexico  
Basalt stone, Height 20 1/2"  
Lowe Art Museum, 62.045.004

7.

**Tlaloc Priest**  
A.D. 1400-1521  
Aztec, Mexico  
Basalt stone, Height 23"  
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 1991.127.001

Images of Tlaloc, the Aztec rain god, are easily recognizable because of their distinctive goggle eyes, twisted nose, and fanged mouth with a curving upper lip. Tlaloc is often shown wearing a bonnet of heron feathers, which signify the clouds associated with his coming. The Lowe Art Museum Tlaloc is abstract to the point that it is uncertain if the effigy is intended to represent the deity or a human impersonator. The face does
not have the aspect of a mask, and the figure wears only a simple loincloth and a knob of feathers on the top of the head.

The Kislak example, however, seems more likely to represent a deity impersonator. Elaborately carved and possessing more costume detail, this standing Tlaloc figure wears a serpent head and tasseled ear spools. The headdress features folded horizontal fans at the back of the head and two long, overlapping flaps that fall from the cap to the waist at the rear. The left hand holds a sphere with a human face. Here the diety’s characteristic nose, lip, and eyes are worn as a mask, which is created by a pair of entwined serpents. In general, Tlaloc is associated with the color blue, although in the present example, traces of red paint are present on the stone surface.

M.J.

SOURCES:
Lowe Art Museum (1990)
Baquedano (1984)
Arthur Dunkelman
8.

Maize Goddess
A.D. 1400-1521
Aztec, Mexico
Basalt stone, Height 19 7/8"
Lowe Art Museum, 56.003.000

Chicomecoatl, or “Seven Serpent,” was the Aztec goddess of sustenance and one of the most important fertility deities. Often associated with the maize cult and ripe corn, she was venerated most lavishly at harvest time. She is frequently represented holding ears of corn or with corn attached to her costume. Such statues were often painted red and could be placed in shrines or in domestic altars.

In this example, the standing figure holds double pod-shaped objects in both hands. These probably represent double maize ears, or possibly gourd rattles. Whether the figure is intended to be a supernatural being or a deity impersonator is unclear. The figure wears a large box shaped temple headdress that identifies her as the goddess, but this headdress was also worn by deity impersonators during religious events. Such headdresses were made of rectangular wood frames, which were covered with
gaily-colored *amate* bark paper and adorned with paper rosettes, knots, and streamers.

M.J.

**SOURCES:**
Lowe Art Museum (1990)
Baquedano (1984)

9.

**Coiled Rattlesnake with Day Sign**

A.D. 1400-1521  
Aztec, Mexico  
Basalt stone, Height 14”

Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 1992.092.00.0001

Snakes are the most frequently depicted animals in Aztec art. Generally naturalistic in form, some Aztec snakes represent deities, such as the Feathered Serpent (Quetzalcoatl) or the Fire Serpent (Xiuhtoatl). The tightly coiled serpent displayed here has a diamond-patterned surface texture that suggests the skin of a real snake. Even though this snake lacks the feathers or other attributes of Quetzalcoatl, the image carved on its underside connects it to cosmic events. Here we find the image of a crouching rabbit next to a single circle. This represents the date glyph Ce Tochtli (One Rabbit). Ce-Tochtli was both the name of Mayahuel, the goddess of pulque (an intoxicating beverage), and a highly significant date in its own right. The One Rabbit symbol referred to the year of the earth’s creation in Aztec mythology. Quetzalcoatl’s special role in this event might explain why One Rabbit appears under this sculpture.

M.J.
Warriors were important members of Mexica society. This sculpted figure displays the kind of costume worn by a high status member of the jaguar knights, one of two professional military organizations within the empire. This hollow work is made of clay that has been painted with stucco, as well as red, yellow, and blue pigments, after firing. Here the soldier wears a jaguar helmet backed by an appliqué feather plaque. He may originally have carried a spear or other weapon in his raised hand. His eyes are surrounded by a twisted, double-headed serpent, and cat-like fangs protrude from his mouth. His necklace of large beads and wristlets convey elite or royal social status. The Aztec empire was built upon the forced assimilation of neighboring tribes, accomplished through the efforts of a highly organized professional military. A jaguar knight held one of the highest positions within the Aztec military system, and this position was open only to those of royal birth who had captured at least four prisoners. On certain ceremonial occasions, jaguar
knights dressed in the costume worn by this figure assisted in the sacrifice of prisoners to Tezcatlipoca, their patron deity.

T.A.

SOURCES:

II.

Juan de Tovar (ca. 1546-ca. 1626), Historia de los Mexicanos (History of the Mexicans) a) Moctezuma II, b) Templo Mayor, c) Ritual Dance, d) Gladiatorial Combat
A.D. 1830-1860 [nineteenth-century copy of sixteenth-century original]
Spain and England
Manuscript, Dimensions vary: 7" x 10" and 9 1/4" x 12 1/2"
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 1994.022.00.0005

Juan de Tovar was a Spanish Jesuit and lifelong missionary in Mexico. He was an expert in Nahuatl, the language of the Aztecs, and became an avid collector of Aztec codices. His study of these texts and other sources resulted in Historia de la benida de los yndios apoblar a Mexico (1582-1587), a multi-volume work on the history and culture of pre-Hispanic Mexico. Although this study remained in manuscript form, Tovar's fellow Jesuit José de Acosta borrowed much of this material for his Historia
natural y moral de las Indias (1589). The images included here are copies from the set of fifty-one original drawings that formed the third part of this manuscript. The original manuscript is in the collection of the John Carter Brown Library. This work first became known to historians in the nineteenth century. The Kislak copies were commissioned by the noted collector Sir Thomas Phillips.

R.B.

SOURCES:
Delgado-Gomez (1992)

I2.

Techialoyan Manuscript
Seventeenth or eighteenth century
Valley of Mexico
Amatl paper (fig tree bark), 25" x 42 1/2"
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 1996.009.00.0001

This colonial period manuscript is one of a group of similar works produced in and around the Valley of Mexico in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Known as Techialoyan manuscripts, these “títulos primordiales” were essentially municipal histories that documented, in text and pictures, local accounts of important events and territorial boundaries. This
example articulates a narrative related to the history and territory of San Juan Tolcayuca, located northeast of Mexico City.

Indigenous cartographic conventions evident in this map differ considerably from those of Europe in both conception of social function and artistic execution. Here the artist constructs the image from around each of the document’s four edges. To correctly view the various parts of the map, one must rotate it. Pre-Hispanic conventions evident here include the generically bell-shaped hill and the trail of footprints that give the composition directionality. The focal point of the image is the central cluster of buildings in San Juan Tolcayuca. Included here are a large hill and a church, the latter being the location for a meeting held by a group of townspeople. Images like this one visually depict the legitimacy and public recognition of the local community, or tepetl.

As colonial Mexican authorities tightened their grasp over land holdings, it became increasingly important for indigenous communities to assert traditional claims. Spanish land title verifications conducted from the mid-seventeenth century to the early eighteenth century increasingly demanded documentary evidence, which was satisfied with maps like this one.

M.J.

SOURCES:
Map of Temixtitan (Tenochtitlan), from Hernán Cortés, Praeclara Ferdinandi Cortéssi de Nova maris Oceani Hispania Narratio (The Clear Narration by Hernán Cortés about the New Spain of the Atlantic Ocean)
A.D. 1524
Spain
Paper, 8" x 11½", open 16" across
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 1987.051.00.0001

This is one of the most famous European images of Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec empire, and present site of Mexico City. This woodcut map was included in the Latin edition of Hernán Cortés's second letter to Charles V. It became the source for almost all European views of the Aztec capital until the eighteenth century (see also cat. 15). Although it was created in Europe after the destruction of much of the city, this view from above attempts to reconstruct Tenochtitlan as Cortés first witnessed it. Although this map demonstrates clear European pictorial conventions, it may be based in part on a map given to Cortés by Moctezuma. On the right, we look down into the city of Tenochtitlan, which was built on an island in the middle of Lake Texcoco. Extending out from Tenochtitlan and across the water are three causeways and an aqueduct to the mainland. The Mexica were masters of the water, here demonstrated by the canoes that float outside the city walls. Canals connected all parts of the city, causing early Europeans to liken Tenochtitlan to Venice. Close examination reveals the city's ceremonial center and the Templo Mayor, here represented as two pyramids connected by the sun. It is labeled templum ubi sacrificant (temple where sacrifices are made). Above the headless, curiously classical, figure is the label capita sacrificatorum (sacrificial heads). This figure, and the spider-like black skulls displayed in the latticework rack below it, are clear references to the human sacrifices carried out at the temple. Although not present in the city, the encroaching Spanish presence is suggested by the flag with the black Hapsburg eagle that flies over one of the cities outside of the Mexica capital. This may represent Veracruz, which Cortés founded in 1519 before he entered Tenochtitlan. To the left (with little regard for accuracy in scale) we see the Gulf of Mexico, which includes one of the first uses of the title “La Florida,” which is what the Spanish called the southeastern region of what is now the United States.

R.B.

SOURCES:
This map was produced for Johann Huttich’s *Novus Orbis Regionum*, and it has traditionally been attributed to the famous German portraitist Hans Holbein the Younger (1497-1543). The artist has combined and modified features found on earlier maps that included the Americas, such as the existence of North America as a separate continent, and Columbus’ claim that Cuba was not a separate island. On this map, the artist has labeled North America “Terra de Cuba.” One of the two large islands of the Caribbean (Cuba and Hispaniola) has been deleted because of the cartographer’s confusion of North America and Cuba.

The most important characteristic of this map is its depiction of the earth’s rotation. This is represented by two winged cherubs at either pole who turn the earth with hand-cranks. This detail suggests that the mapmaker must have been in contact with the radical ideas of Copernicus, because it predates the publication of his theory on the workings of the universe by eleven years.

Other noteworthy imagery includes the stick dwelling decorated with severed human limbs and heads in the lower left-hand corner. According to Amerigo Vespucci’s highly popular *Mundus Novus* (New World, 1503), the peoples of the New World were cannibals and cured human flesh like hams outside their homes. This accusation of cannibalism was used to justify European conquest of America and the forced conversion to Christianity of its peoples.

T.A.

SOURCES:
Schilling (1999)
Honour (1975)
This sixteenth-century multi-volume publication includes woodcut views of cities from all over the world. It was intended to stimulate the imagination and allow the armchair traveler a glimpse of the world beyond. Braun and Hogenberg included Cusco in Peru and Tenochtitlan (Mexico City) among the most important cities of the world. These city views follow European conventions of representation and were created for a literate audience in Europe that was becoming increasingly aware of the New World. The image of Tenochtitlan (on the left) is clearly drawn from the Cortés map of 1524 (see cat. 13), although the sacrificial victim at the map's center has curiously regained his head. Other changes to the 1524 original include the introduction of elegant human figures in the foreground, here intended to represent the Mexica nobility of Tenochtitlan. This juxtaposition of human figures with city views was an innovation by Braun; it is also found in the map of Cusco, capital of the Inca empire, on the right. In the foreground of this map, we find a highly dignified representation of an anonymous Inca king, here seated in a sedan chair carried by four servants. The debt that these figures owe to classical antiquity is not only in their idealized bodies and elegant poses, but also in the helmets and clothing worn by the king's retinue of soldiers.

R.B.

Autograph letter from King Philip II of Spain to Archbishop Pedro de Contreras
December 2, 1578
Spain
Paper, 8" x 12"
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 1993.220.00.0001

This letter was written by King Philip II (reigned 1556-1598) to Pedro de Contreras, archbishop of Mexico. Here Philip expresses his desire that missionaries in Spanish America learn indigenous languages to aid the conversion of native peoples to Catholicism. The conversion to Catholicism of the subject population formed a central part of the establishment of Spanish colonial authority and power. Catholic priests came to the Americas on Columbus’ second voyage, in 1493, and priests later accompanied Hernán Cortés to the Mexican mainland and participated in the conquest of the Mexica at Tenochtitlan. Members of the missionary orders, such as Franciscans, Dominicans, Mercedarians, and Jesuits, had the exclusive right to convert indigenous populations.

M.F.
For Cortés and other Europeans during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, much of the motivation for conquest lay in the acquisition of wealth in general and gold in particular. This can be seen in repeated attempts to locate El Dorado, the fabled city of gold. Gold was tied to wealth and status throughout the colonial period, both through the display of gold items, such as jewelry worn by elite men and women, and as a unit of monetary exchange.

In this document Cortés confirms that Francisco de Santa Cruz will receive 150 pesos of gold to be given and paid to the sailors Juan Montanez and Lorenzo Rodriguez. Cortés signed his documents and letters in one of three ways: Hernándo Cortés, El Marques, and El Marques de Valle de Oaxaco. This document is signed in the first way—the most unusual of the three. After 1529, when he was designated El Marques del Valle de Oaxaco, he always used some variant of this title.
Hernán Cortés, Dowry for Moctezuma’s Daughter
Eighteenth century [copy of a sixteenth-century document from Mexico]
Spain
Paper
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 1990.004.00.0001

In this document Cortés justifies his grant of a large dowry to Doña Isabel Moctezuma, the late emperor’s oldest daughter, by recounting the events of the Conquest and the importance of Moctezuma’s aid to the Spanish. Doña Isabel married a Spanish nobleman of considerable standing in New Spain. In this letter Cortés gives her encomiendas, grants of indigenous land and labor, and several ranches.

A.D.
Beginning in 1561 and continuing until 1748, two fleets a year were sent from Spain to the Americas. They brought supplies to the colonists and returned to Europe filled with silver, gold, and agricultural products. After collecting cargo at Portobello (Panama), Cartagena (Colombia), Veracruz (Mexico), and other capitals of Spanish America, the ships regrouped at Havana, Cuba, and sailed north as a group up the Gulf Stream along the coast of Florida, and then across the Atlantic Ocean to Europe.

In early September 1622, the newly constructed Nuestra Señora de Atocha, a 110-foot galleon carrying a large portion of the Spanish fleet’s treasure, began the voyage home. A hurricane ravaged the fleet in the Florida Keys, and the ship wrecked on the coral reefs near Dry Tortugas. Out of eighty-two infantrymen and 183 passengers and crew members, only five survived, and the entire ship and its cargo were lost.

The remains of the Atocha were found on July 20, 1985 in fifty-five feet of water. The gold bullion shown here, once destined for Spain, was recovered during the salvage efforts.

M.J.
“The Indians pour molten gold into the mouths of the Christians,” in Theodor de Bry, *Grands Voyages* (Great Voyages), Part VI.

A.D. 1594-1596

Germany

Paper, 13¼" x 8¾"

Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 2002.084.00001

This image illustrates a scene from de Bry’s edition of Italian adventurer Girolamo Benzoni’s account of his fifteen years in the Spanish colonies of the New World. Along with Bartolomé las Casas, Benzoni is often considered a source for the Black Legend, which refers to the reputation the Spanish had for acts of vicious cruelty against the indigenous populations of the Americas. Theodor de Bry, the engraver and publisher of the Grand Voyages series, was virulently anti-Spanish and anti-Catholic. His images often demonstrate the nobility of the Indians against the savagery of the Spanish. In this image, however, we see three men torturing a Spaniard by pouring molten gold down his throat. The image is an ironic commentary on the Spanish lust for gold.

R.B.

SOURCES: Bucher (1981)
Antonio de Solís (1610-1686) served Charles II as Secretary of State (appointed 1654) and later as the official historian for the Indies. It is in this capacity that he produced this monumental work on the Conquest of Mexico. Removed by more than 150 years from the events he described, Solís relied heavily on the work of previous chroniclers, such as Lopéz de Gomara, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, and Cortés himself. With its artful writing style, his book was immediately successful, bringing new attention to Cortés and a heroic view of the Conquest. This work may have directly inspired the Kislak Conquest of Mexico series of paintings. The frontispiece displays a portrait of King Charles II held aloft by two female figures that personify the lands of Spain and New Spain (Mexico). On the right New Spain is nude, although she wears a stereotypically Indian feather headdress. The fruits and veg-
etation depicted in the image suggest that the rule of Charles II over these realms will be a prosperous one.

M.F.

SOURCES:
Delgado-Gomez (1992)

22.

Alonso de Molina, *Vocabulario en lengua castellana y mexicana* (Spanish and Mexican language dictionary)
Mexico, 1571
Paper, 7 7/8" x 10 7/8"
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 1997.009.00.0001

This work is both the first dictionary printed in the New World and the first systematic analysis of an indigenous American language. Molina was a Franciscan who arrived in Mexico shortly after the Conquest. He produced this work to fit the needs of missionaries like himself, who were charged with introducing Christianity into the New World. This Spanish/Nahuatl dictionary allowed missionaries to communicate much more effectively with the indigenous population of Mexico, thus facilitating the process of conversion. The emphasis on Nahuatl in works like this one reflected official colonial policy, which resulted in the marginalization of other spoken and written languages of Mexico. The frontispiece of this work depicts Saint Francis, founder of the Franciscan order, displaying the marks of his stigmata.

A.D.
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