I.

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 Mexica culture the skull had numerous symbolic connotations. For example, the diety 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:
2.

**Mosaic Earflares**

A.D. 1400-1521  
Aztec, Mexico  
Shell and turquoise, Diameter 2"  
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 1992.084.00.0002

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)
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, 1991.127.0001

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 deity’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
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 (Xiuhtecuhtli). 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 9¼" x 12½"
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)

12.

**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:
13.

Map of Temixtitan (Tenochtitlan), from Hernán Cortés, Prae-clara Ferdinandi Cortéssi de Nova maris Oceani Hyspania 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-crancks. This detail suggests that the mapmaker must have been in contact with the radical ideas of Copernicus, because it predate 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.
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: Hernández 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.

M.F.; A.D.
In this document Cortés justifies his grant of a large dowry to Doña Isabel Moctezuma, the late emperor’s eldest 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, 13 1/2" x 8 3/4"
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 Bartolome 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 y Ribadenyra, *Historia de la Conquista de México* (History of the Conquest of Mexico)
A.D. 1684
Spain
Paper, 7¾" x 11¼"
Jay I. Kislak Foundation, 1993.161.00.0008

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-
oration 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.