COLLECTING MEXICAN ART BEFORE 1940: A NEW WORLD OF AMERICAN ANTIQUITIES

NOVEMBER 14–15, 2019
MUSEUM LECTURE HALL
GETTY CENTER
ABOUT THE KEYNOTE
Art historian Megan E. O’Neil examines the changing US market in antiquities from Mexico and Central America in the 1930s and 1940s by focusing on Pierre Matisse and Earl Stendahl, art dealers in New York City and Los Angeles, respectively. Both Matisse and Stendahl began their businesses trading European art before adding pre-Hispanic art in the 1930s. But conflict in Europe during World War II prompted changes in the art business and, during this period, the pre-Hispanic art market largely shifted from Europe to the Americas. Matisse’s correspondence illuminates the human stories that accompanied these changes, as some of his European contacts went into exile. Both men started collaborating with Mexican dealers in acquiring pieces directly from Mexico, precipitating a growth in the removal of pre-Hispanic objects from that country. While Matisse eventually stopped acquiring antiquities, in subsequent decades the Stendahl Galleries bought and sold thousands of pre-Hispanic objects from Mexico and Central America. This lecture follows the changing geographies of the art market and the lives of these two men, their sources, and their clients, who together provided the foundations for many pre-Hispanic art collections in American museums today.

ABOUT THE SYMPOSIUM
This international symposium is the inaugural event associated with the Getty Research Institute’s new Pre-Hispanic Art Provenance Initiative. Responding to the pressing need for preservation of ancient Mesoamerican heritage and its provenance, the initiative comprises the first systematic study of how the corpus of pre-Hispanic art took shape in North America and Europe and came to form centerpiece collections of some of the most important art museums in the world.

Speakers focus on early collections assembled between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries. The year 1940—when the Museum of Modern Art hosted the groundbreaking exhibition Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art, featuring works of Mexican ancient, colonial, modern, and folk art—marks the turning point when sales of pre-Hispanic art began to boom on the international art market, in part through the commercial activities of the Stendahl Gallery in Los Angeles. This symposium presents efforts of curators and scholars to study these collections comprehensively and to investigate the broader role of pre-Hispanic art in the history of the art market and in the formation of international collections and institutions.

Thursday, November 14, 2019

7:00 p.m.  Welcome  
Mary Miller, Getty Research Institute

Keynote Lecture  
“Good Pieces in Sight”: The US Market in Mesoamerican Antiquities circa 1940  
Megan E. O’Neil, Emory University

8:00 p.m.  Panel Discussion  
Megan E. O’Neil  
Mary Miller  
Matthew H. Robb, Fowler Museum at UCLA

Friday, November 15, 2019

9:30 a.m.  Registration and Coffee

10:00 a.m.  Welcome  
Mary Miller, Getty Research Institute

10:20 a.m  Session I: Collections in Mexico and Guatemala  

The History of Objects and the Objects of History: Maximilien Franck’s Catalogue of Mexican Antiquities  
Matthew H. Robb, Fowler Museum at UCLA

Local, Regional, and Imperial Rivalry: Archaeological Collecting in Nineteenth-Century Mexico  
Adam Sellen, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Mérida

“A scientific classification is not a bazaar”: Inventories and the Science of Mexico’s Ancient Past  
Miruna Achim, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Cuajimalpa

11:20 a.m.  Break

11:40 a.m.  Casting for Quirigua: The School of American Archaeology and Research on Ancient Mesoamerica, 1907–1916  
Khristaan Villela, Museum of International Folk Art

In the Footsteps of Guatemala’s First National Museum  
Oswaldo Chinchilla Mazariegos, Yale University

12:20 p.m.  Lunch
2:00 p.m.  Session II: Collections in the US and Europe

Extended Provenances: The Cultural Biographies of Mesoamerican Artifacts in Italy and Beyond
Davide Domenici, Università di Bologna

From Curiosity to Thirst for Knowledge and Collecting Mania: The Formation of Pre-Columbian Museum Collections in Berlin, Hamburg, and Basel
Viola König, Freie Universität Berlin

Black Gold and Stone Figures: Collecting Huastec Sculpture before 1940
Kim Richter, Getty Research Institute

Branding West Mexico: Early Collectors vs. Art Dealers
Christopher S. Beekman, University of Colorado Denver

3:20 p.m.  Break

3:40 p.m.  Maya on the Mersey: Thomas Gann and Collecting in Early Twentieth-Century Britain
Andrew Turner, Getty Research Institute

The Avery Judd Skilton Collection
Brooke Luokkala, Emory University

4:20 pm  “American Antiquities for an American Museum”: Frederick Church, Luigi Petich, and the Founding Decades of The Metropolitan Museum of Art (1870–1914)
Joanne Pillsbury, Metropolitan Museum of Art

4:40 pm  Discussion
Moderated by Mary Miller

5:15 pm  Concluding Remarks
Mary Miller

5:30 pm  Public Reception