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The Met to Reopen Its Arts of the Ancient Americas Galleries on May 31 Following a Multiyear Renovation

The reimaged galleries in The Met’s Michael C. Rockefeller Wing reframe and reintroduce the Museum’s collection of works from North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean, representing almost 6,000 years of history and presenting new research on artists, materials, and meanings

(New York, May 28, 2025)— The Metropolitan Museum of Art will reopen its Arts of the Ancient Americas galleries on May 31, 2025. The galleries have been closed to the public since summer 2021, and the reopening follows the completion of a major renovation and reenvisioning of The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, where the galleries are housed.

The new installation is organized around nearly 700 works selected to foreground the artistic legacy of Indigenous artists from across North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean prior to 1600 CE. Reflecting contemporary scholarship and research and providing a more encompassing view of the ancestral arts of the Americas, it reintroduces this extraordinary collection to a new generation of visitors. The new galleries include monumental stone sculptures and exquisite metalwork, illuminated by filtered daylight emanating from Central Park through a custom-designed, state-of-the-art sloped glass wall on the building’s south facade. The collection also includes refined ceramic vessels; shimmering regalia of gold, shell, and semiprecious stone; and delicate wood sculptures.

The suite of new galleries was designed by Kulapat Yantrasast of the firm WHY Architecture in collaboration with Beyer, Blinder, Belle Architects LLP, and with The Met’s Design Department. The new Arts of the Ancient Americas galleries are across from the Modern and Contemporary Art galleries and adjacent to those dedicated to the arts

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of the Pacific region in the also-reenvisioned Arts of Oceania galleries. Drawing inspiration from ancient American architectural traditions, the design incorporates stone platforms that echo the layout of landmarks from Mesoamerica and the Andean region, from the rectilinear plazas of Central Mexico to the U-shaped, enfolding arms in the sacred architecture of Peru's North Coast. Among the highlights is a new gallery devoted to light-sensitive, ancient American textiles and featherwork that frames a 3,000-year history of achievements in the fiber arts.

"The new Rockefeller Wing stunningly illuminates the rich cultures that brought life to these collections and create connections for the many diverse and far-flung communities they represent," said Max Hollein, The Met's Marina Kellen French Director and Chief Executive Officer. "From critical discoveries regarding the textiles and pigments used in pre-Hispanic art to providing new insights into the social, political, and historical contexts of the artists who created these works, the reinstatement of our Arts of the Ancient Americas galleries foregrounds new scholarship that deepens understanding and engagement with our collection."

The new installation is the result of a close, eight-year collaboration with colleagues across Latin America. The renovated galleries reflect recent advances in scholarship, incorporating knowledge about artists, their materials, their techniques, and their social roles and newly revealed relationships between regions. The galleries are also more expansive in scope and consider Indigenous traditions in the Viceregal (Colonial) period, while also benefiting from new perspectives on indigenous concepts about the natural world as well as nuanced perceptions of gender roles. Where possible, indigenous texts—ancient, historical, and modern—have informed the curatorial narrative, enriching the interpretation and appreciation of the works in the collection.

Joanne Pillsbury, the Andrall E. Pearson Curator of the Arts of the Ancient Americas, said, "Since the Museum's founding, the presence of these works at The Met has reflected shifting sensibilities about the place of ancient American art in a global history of art. Over the last 30 years, we've seen a revolution in our understanding of the Inca, the Classic Maya, and the other great cultures that thrived in Latin America before the 16th century, including the identification of specific, named artists. It has been exciting to work with scholars from across the Americas to reconceive the galleries in light of this new knowledge."

Gallery Design and Experience

At the primary entrance to the Arts of the Ancient Americas galleries, visitors encounter an animated map that provides an overview of the hemisphere from the first waves of migrations to the Americas over 20,000 years ago to the present day, emphasizing the rise of cultural traditions, colonial transformations, and the movement of people and ideas through history. This digital feature aims to visually convey the relationship between these ancient cultures and contemporary communities—including Latin American diasporas in the United States—and highlight the continuing presence of Indigenous communities in the Americas.

Laura Filloy Nadal, Curator of the Arts of the Ancient Americas, said: "Today, the artistic diversity in these galleries mirrors constellations of contemporary ethnicities and nationalities that are at the core of New York's social fabric. Although these works were created by Indigenous artists

centuries ago, their descendants—often carrying a multicultural heritage—thrive in New York today.”

Visitors are greeted by a striking stone monument from Teotihuacan—a vast, cosmopolitan city that prospered in Central Mexico in the first six centuries. Considered the birthplace of the gods by the Mexica (also known as Aztec), Teotihuacan, with its extensive program of mural painting and bold, distinctive sculptural style, became an important site of pilgrimage by the 15th century. The Mexica’s own artistic achievements are celebrated through the presentation of monumental ritual sculptures and delicate luxury arts created from shell, semiprecious stones, and gold.

The redesigned galleries are organized roughly chronologically and geographically. To the west are the oldest objects in the collection: finely carved lithic objects known as bannerstones, some made as long ago as 4000 BCE; delicate ivory implements of the Old Bering Sea tradition; and female figurines from coastal Ecuador. To the east are the bold imperial styles of the Mexica and the Inca, the two largest empires of the ancient Americas.

Expanded square footage that was achieved by converting storage space into display space has allowed for the inclusion of works that had not been on view previously, providing opportunities for a deeper exploration of themes and ideas. Recent gifts to the Museum are also on display, including a majestic standing female figure created by Huastec artists at some point in the last few centuries before the Spanish invasion in the early 16th century.

A highlight of the Central Park–adjacent galleries is a painted stone relief featuring a scene from a Maya royal court. This relief, the only work in the Arts of the Ancient Americas galleries that bears the signature of an artist—the Maya artist Chakalte', active about 750–800—also retains traces of its original pigment, a reminder that many of these stone monuments were originally brightly painted. A special in-gallery digital feature looks at the original context and its inscription, accentuating the politics and pomp of courtly life of the Maya world in the 770s.

Other highlights include the comprehensive presentation of works of art in metal—works that reveal the technological sophistication and aesthetic achievements of artists in ancient Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, and Mexico. Another in-gallery digital feature illuminates the development of complex metal-working technologies that were deployed in northern Peru to achieve dazzling results, including elements of a warrior’s regalia.

Displayed in a single gallery before the reinstallation, the collection of ancient American gold is now displayed across the galleries according to each work’s specific historical context. Visitors will be able to trace the development of gold working from its origins in the Andean region of South America north to Mexico, noting places of exceptional innovation and imagination along this golden road.

Recorded interviews with an interdisciplinary cohort of experts and well-known thought leaders and personalities are featured in audio guides, available in both English and Spanish, podcasts, and new digital content. Spanish-language gallery texts are also available online.

New Gallery Dedicated to Ancient Andean Textiles

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One of the major innovations in the new Arts of the Ancient Americas galleries is a gallery displaying ancient Andean textiles—the first of its kind in the United States. Intricately woven garments and hangings—some older than 2,000 years—are on view here with state-of-the-art casework and lighting, adjacent to the galleries for Modern and Contemporary Art. These delicate, light-sensitive textiles and featherworks will be rotated periodically, allowing for a dynamic presentation of one of the world’s great fiber arts traditions.

Weaving is one of the oldest and most complex art forms from the Andes, extending thousands of years before the rise of the Inca Empire (1470–1532), and arguably the most highly esteemed of the mediums. The region also boasts one of the most diverse approaches to textile construction known globally. Drawing on a wide repertoire of geometric and figurative designs, weavers developed exquisite designs for textiles that were intended for, among other things, use as everyday objects, royal gifts, and sacred offerings. A highlight of the collection is the presentation of nine monumentally scaled panels made from the feathers of blue-and-yellow macaws—strikingly bold compositions likely intended to grace a grand building. Ongoing research with national and international partners seeks to illuminate how ancient artists sourced the feathers: stable isotope analyses can reveal the birds’ diets, providing clues to whether the feathers were gathered in Amazonia—the birds’ natural habitat—or whether the birds were raised in captivity on the coast, where these panels were likely made.

Planning and Partnerships

With support from the David L. Klein, Jr. Foundation, the initial international planning meeting for the Arts of the Ancient Americas galleries was held in Mexico City in 2018, hosted by the Museo Nacional de Antropología and the Museo del Templo Mayor. The meeting was followed by subsequent scholarly exchanges in New York and at the Clark Art Institute in Williamstown, Massachusetts, and across Latin America with archaeologists, artists, anthropologists, and other leading thinkers who are engaged with advanced research on the visual arts of Latin America before 1600. This collaboration from the inception of the project has substantially broadened and deepened understandings of The Met’s collection and informed its presentation and interpretation, particularly as archaeological and art-historical research on the ancient Americas has vastly expanded in the four decades since The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing opened, in 1982. These new understandings that have been informed by the input from colleagues from across the country and Latin America are reflected in the reinstalled galleries. Scholars and artists from diverse backgrounds collaborated with The Met’s curatorial team in a series of conversations around the artworks and the continuing importance of these ancient traditions in the Americas today. These discussions were instrumental in the conceptualization of the galleries, the selection of objects, and the development of the narratives.

“These convenings have been vital for recognizing museums as places for ongoing conversations about our histories and our world today. The conversations have helped us all contextualize our own institutions and forge deeper partnerships for the years ahead,” said Ulla Holmquist Pachas, Director of the Museo Larco in Lima, Peru.

“These gatherings challenged us all to consider how we make ancient traditions relevant to our lives today. Through these conversations, we could collectively consider the ways in which these

great traditions were foundational to our world,” added Patricia Ledesma Bouchan, Director of the Museo del Templo Mayor in Mexico City.

Conservation

As part of the renovation, numerous works were the subject of in-depth scholarly study by curators in concert with staff in the Department of Objects Conservation and Department of Scientific Research, as well as conservation staff in The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing.

In collaboration with Peruvian archaeologists Hugo Ikehara-Tsukayama and José Ochoyoma Paravicino, Met researchers have been analyzing the dyes used to create fine textiles woven some 1,500 years ago in the Central Highlands of Peru, one of several ongoing studies yielding important new insights into the materials and methods employed by artists in the ancient Americas. New discoveries, such as the presence of traces of what were once bright pigments on Mexica sculpture, or the revelation of the distant sources of the dyes used to create dazzling garments of the Wari Empire (600–900 CE), have broadened our understandings of the appearance and meanings of these works.

Residencies

The Museum continues to engage with museum professionals, scholars, and researchers in North, Central, and South America through residencies and fellowships that support new research and the presentation of works in public displays. These residencies build on decades of academic fellowships at The Met—an international program that has fostered the exchange of ideas and expertise in the scholarly community, greatly enriching our knowledge of the arts of the ancient Americas. Recent fellows include:

—Carol Rodríguez Romero, Lurie Fund Resident for the Arts of the Ancient Americas (January 13–July 11, 2025)

—Amanda Suárez Calderón, Lurie Fund Resident for the Arts of the Ancient Americas (January 13–July 11, 2025)

The Arts of the Ancient Americas Collection

The new permanent installation in the Arts of the Ancient Americas galleries represents almost 5,000 years of history from North, Central, and South America and the Caribbean. The majority of the artworks were created between 1200 BCE and 1600 CE in Mesoamerica south to the Andean region and produced in a variety of media, from monumental stone sculpture to delicate featherwork.

History

The Met’s first galleries devoted to the arts of the ancient Americas opened in the late 19th century. As early as 1873, Mexican stone sculpture and Peruvian ceramics were gifts to The Met from diplomats and artists, including one of the Museum’s founders, the American painter Frederic

Church. Much of the collection was later removed from view and sent on long-term loan to the American Museum of Natural History, losing its designation as art in the process.

It was not until the opening of The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing in 1982 that the Museum began to exhibit the art of Latin America before European colonization in a sustained and comprehensive way.

The Met's collection of ancient American art offers a far-reaching survey of outstanding examples of the major traditions, including a rare Maya sculpture in wood; a 1,000-year-old *zemí* figure from the Caribbean; and perhaps the finest synoptic collection of works of art in gold known anywhere. Further reading on the history of the ancient American collection is available in [The Metropolitan Museum of Art Journal, vol. 56 \(2021\)](#); and for more information about the history of The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, see [The Nelson A. Rockefeller Vision: Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas](#).

Latin American Art Across The Met

The new galleries expand the scope of what is often called “Pre-Columbian art,” which is strictly defined as the arts of Latin America prior to the European invasions after 1492, to consider Indigenous traditions in the Viceregal (Colonial) period, such the continued use of Inca tapestry-woven garments in ecclesiastical contexts, or the simultaneous use of Indigenous toponyms (place signs) and Spanish text on a stone monument. The story of these continuities and ruptures is one that is also represented across the Museum.

Works from North, South, and Central America and the Caribbean are found in more than half of The Met's 19 collecting areas, including, besides the new galleries for the Arts of the Ancient Americas, European Paintings; the American Wing; Arms and Armor; the Costume Institute; Drawings and Prints; European Sculpture and Decorative Arts; Modern and Contemporary Art; Musical Instruments; and Photographs. Since 2018, The Met's Native American collections—items created by indigenous artists in what is now the United States—have been presented primarily in the American Wing.

About The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing

The Met's Michael C. Rockefeller Wing—40,000 square feet on the Museum's south side—includes the three distinct collections of the arts of Africa, the ancient Americas, and Oceania, displaying them as discrete elements in an overarching wing that is in dialogue with the Museum's collection as a whole.

During the 1950s and 1960s, the American statesman and philanthropist Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller assembled a fine-arts survey of other-than-Western art traditions that included the ancient Americas as well as areas of the world not represented in the Museum's collection, notably African and Oceanic art. In 1969, it was announced that Rockefeller's collection would be transferred to The Met as a new department and wing. Opened to the public in 1982, the addition was named after Nelson Rockefeller's son, Michael C. Rockefeller, who was greatly inspired by the cultures and art of the Pacific and pursued new avenues of inquiry into artistic practice during his

travels there. Among the wing's signature works are the striking Asmat sculptures he researched and collected in southwest New Guinea.

In addition to the Arts of the Ancient Americas, the new Arts of Oceania galleries include signature monumental works from New Guinea as well as a suite of more intimate spaces dedicated to island cultures, while the new Arts of Africa galleries present a survey of major visual traditions developed across sub-Saharan Africa and their interface with the Greek and Roman Art galleries providing an opportunity for new considerations of Africa in antiquity. The reenvisioning of each of these suites of galleries builds on international planning workshops and consultation with dozens of local and international leaders in the arts and humanities.

For more information about the new Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, please visit The Met's [website](#).

Related Programs

The Met will host an opening festival to celebrate The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing on Saturday, May 31, from noon to 6pm. The day of festivities will begin with three vibrant performances reflecting the arts and cultures of Africa, the ancient Americas, and Oceania. The day will feature engaging activities for visitors of all ages, including film screenings, artist demonstrations, hands-on art-making opportunities, and meaningful conversations with Museum volunteers stationed throughout the permanent collection galleries. For a full list of activities and events, please visit The Met's [website](#).

Following the reopening of the galleries, The Met will present an international symposium "New Discoveries/New Directions in the Archaeology of the Ancient Americas" on Saturday, September 13, highlighting the new archaeological discoveries that have shifted perspectives on the visual arts of the civilizations that thrived in Latin America prior to 1600 CE. Speakers will address not only the revolutionary new understandings precipitated by these discoveries but also our current moment and the big questions that remain for the study of the arts of the Mexica, the Inca, the Maya, the Moche, and the many other civilizations of the ancient Americas.

To mark the occasion of the reopening of the Arts of the Ancient Americas galleries, MetLiveArts along with Carnegie Hall co-commissioned a new work, *Canta la Piedra-Tetluikan* (A Song of the Stone), by Gabriela Ortiz with a libretto by Mardonio Carballo—a contemporary Nahuatl poet. The work is specifically written for a cappella vocal ensemble. The concert, which will include The Met premiere of Ortiz's *Canta la Piedra-Tetluikan*, on Friday, November 7, will also feature a joint performance of a new arrangement of Ortiz's *Kaiyumari* by the award-winning Roomful of Teeth and the Mexican choral ensemble Coro Acardenchado. Coro Acardenchado will also offer selections of *Canto Cardenche*, an endangered folk tradition.

Credits

We thank all who have made possible the renovation of The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, including leadership commitments from The Carson Family Charitable Trust, Kyveli and George Economou, Bobby Kotick, Drs. Daniel and Marian Malcolm, Adam Lindemann and Amalia Dayan, Samuel H. and Linda M. Lindenbaum, Samuel and Gabrielle Lurie, The Marron Family, Naddisy Foundation,

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the City of New York, the Estate of Abby M. O'Neill, Andrall E. Pearson and Rappaport Family, the Estate of Ruth J. Prager, Ceil and Michael E. Pulitzer, Carlos Rodríguez-Pastor and Gabriela Pérez Rocchietti, Alejandro and Charlotte Santo Domingo, and the Skarstedt Family. Major support was provided by Mr. and Mrs. Richard Lockwood Chilton, Jr., Mariana and Raymond Herrmann, Mary R. Morgan, and Laura G. and James J. Ross.

Events and programming related to the reopening of The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing are made possible by the Breyer Family Foundation, the Ford Foundation, Samuel and Gabrielle Lurie, the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, and the Thompson Family Foundation. Additional support is provided by Stephen M. Cutler and Wendy N. Zimmermann, Kyveli and George Economou, Ed and Dale Mathias, the Mex-Am Cultural Foundation Inc., and two anonymous donors.

The renovation of the galleries was overseen by Alisa LaGamma, Ceil and Michael E. Pulitzer Curator of African Art and Curator in Charge of The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing, and Doris Zhao, Project Manager.

The Arts of the Ancient Americas team includes Laura Filloy Nadal, Curator of the Arts of the Ancient Americas, and Joanne Pillsbury, Andrall E. Pearson Curator of the Arts of the Ancient Americas.

The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing team includes David Rhoads, Christine Giuntini, Lauren Posada, Raychelle Osnato, Damien Marzocchi, Jessi Atwood, Matthew Noiseux, Paige Silva, and Lydia Shaw.

The conservation of these collections was overseen by Lisa Pilosi, Sherman Fairchild Conservator in Charge, Objects Conservation, with conservators Dawn Kriss, Sara Levin, Amanda Chau, Teresa Jiménez-Millas, Marijn Manuels, Carolyn Riccardelli, Chantal Stein, Marlene Yandrisevits, with additional help from the Department of Objects Conservation, as well as a team of conservation preparators dedicated to The Michael C. Rockefeller Wing collection: Matthew Cumbie, Johnny Coast, David Dawson, Sasha Newkirk, Lindsay Rowinski, Nina Ruelle, and staff preparators Warren Bennett, Andrew Estep, Jacob Goble, Laila Lott and Frederick Sager.

The Met's Design team, overseen by Alicia Cheng, Head of Design, includes Patrick Herron, Alexandre Viault, Tiffany Kim, Maanik Chauhan, Sarah Parke, Amy Nelson, Rebecca Forgac, Eva Perez and Brian D. Schneider.

The Met's Digital team, overseen by Douglas Hegley, Chief Digital Officer, includes Paul Caro, Hannah Chen, Skyla Choi, Mandy Kritzeck, Erin Stella and Sarah Wambold.

The design of The Michael C Rockefeller Wing was led by WHY Architecture, in collaboration with The Met's Design Department. Beyer Blinder Belle was the executive architect and led the design of the exterior sloped glazing wall. The construction was managed by AECOM Tishman. The team collaborated with engineers including Kohler Ronan, Thornton Tomasetti, and Arup. The cases were fabricated by Goppion. The design and construction process was led by Justin Mayer (Senior Project Manager, Capital Projects) and Mabel Taylor (Associate Project Manager) of The Met's Capital Projects Department overseen by Brett Gaillard (Head of Capital Projects).

About The Metropolitan Museum of Art

The Metropolitan Museum of Art was founded in 1870 by a group of American citizens—businessmen and financiers as well as leading artists and thinkers of the day—who wanted to create a museum to bring art and art education to the American people. Today, The Met displays tens of thousands of objects covering 5,000 years of art from around the world for everyone to experience and enjoy. The Museum lives in two iconic sites in New York City—The Met Fifth Avenue and The Met Cloisters. Millions of people also take part in The Met experience online. Since its founding, The Met has always aspired to be more than a treasury of rare and beautiful objects. Every day, art comes alive in the Museum’s galleries and through its exhibitions and events, revealing both new ideas and unexpected connections across time and across cultures.

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