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113 - ARGENTINA PRE-COLUMBIAN ART

Spanish conquerors of Argentina paid little attention to the artistic efforts of the native population at the time of the conquest, and therefore, information on aborigine art today is taken from archaeological investigation rather than written history. The cultures of Northwest Argentina attained the highest degree of perfection in their art, probably because of their contact with Peru. Argentine Indians had access to and the industrial capacity to manipulate hard materials and metals. In Pre-Columbian Argentina, all materials available (stone, wood, bone, clay and metal) were used in sculpting. With the exception of a virtually non-existent architecture, the civilization of the Northwest excelled in the development of the plastic arts.

Outside of the Andean regions, indigenous art loses its importance. In the highlands of Cordoba, little proof remains of any artistic endeavor. Here, one finds remains of rustic ceramic objects lacking ornate decoration. Engraving of the clay appears to be the only step taken to beautify the object. Withstanding the underdevelopment of ceramic art, however, this region is known for its highly symbolic and historical pictography found in the cave sites of the area.

In the Northwest regions of Argentina, stone sculptures took the form of animals, many of which were realistic. Human figures and masks with animated expressions were also expertly modeled of hard stone. Bronze was the most common metal used in sculpture. Anthropomorphic and geometric figures, in relief or as engravings on metal plates, have been found as well as very rare miniature animal figures. Carved plaques, also in bronze and of great religious significance, constitute one of the highest achievements in metal sculpture of the area. Equal to these plaques in their craftsmanship are the "cetros de mando", ceremonial axes. Wood was used in manufacturing many different types of instruments useful to the Indians. The villages of Northwest Argentina are known to have had a number of potters or craftsmen, but it is interesting to note that clay, as a ceramic material, was used quite infrequently and when used, it was for objects of lesser importance.

In the Condorhuasi Culture, in Catamarca, classical expression is given the works which take the form of animals or of anthropomorphic figures wither seated, standing, or in the act of crawling on

the hands and feet. Figures appear in the latter posture perhaps to represent their animalistic tendencies. A red ceramic is used, upon which stylized drawings appear in black and white. Unlike classical sculpture, and defining the style of this particular culture, in human figures, many times the hand or foot of the object is shortened and bare. Condorhuasi sculpture evolves from purely classical form (depictive and naturalistic), to one more symbolic and schematic.

Slides:

- A. Figure from the Condorhuasi Culture, 100 - 400 AD. Used primarily as a drinking vessel.
- B. Figure from the Condorhuasi Culture, 100 - 400 AD. Used primarily as a drinking vessel.
- C. Figure from the Condorhuasi Culture, 100 - 400 AD. Used primarily as a drinking vessel.
- D. Vase from the Condorhuasi Culture, 100 - 400 AD.

- E. Head of a parrot. This figure was found on the Argentina coast and is dated approximately 100 AD.

- F. Vase with two heads, Condorhuasi Culture, 100 - 400 AD.

- G. Vase of red clay, painted black and white. Condorhuasi Culture, 100 - 400 AD.

- H. Vase in form of black toad, from Aguada. Red clay, painted black and white.

- I. Red clay vase from the Valley of Cajón, 100 - 400 AD. Used as a drinking vessel, its base is in the form of a head.
- J. Stone sculpture from the Barreal Culture. This type of sculpture was commonly used as a mortar.

All sculptures are from the collection of Guido de Tella, Buenos Aires.

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