



ORGANIZACION DE LOS ESTADOS AMERICANOS  
 ORGANIZAÇÃO DOS ESTADOS AMERICANOS  
 ORGANISATION DES ETATS AMERICAINS  
 ORGANIZATION OF AMERICAN STATES

17th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW Washington, D.C. 20006

AUDIO - VISUAL PROGRAM

SET 181 Piedra de Huamanga figures

Alabaster has always been preferred by the artisans and artists in Peru. The Peruvian alabaster has been named for the place where it comes from - Piedras de Huamanga and Piedra de Lago. There are different qualities of alabaster according to the place where it is quarried. The alabaster from Ayacucho was employed since the prehistoric period. During the Colonial period, it was used for religious objects. During the second half of the XVIII century non-sacred themes made their appearance as well as those of religious descriptions. Change resulted because of a change in the mentality of the people and new social conditions in the American colonies. There are several examples of gallant figures: young men with mandolines, ladies lying on a background of rocks and weeds.

Ayacucho was the main center of alabaster carving. The artists and craftsmen belonged to the low social classes and were not educated. Their customers usually ranged from the bourgeoisie of the province to the upper classes of Lima. Sometimes, instead of the Huamanga stone influenced by the European style, ceramics or china was used for creating figures called "town cries" of Chelsea. Among them, there are some whose execution is marvelous while others are rougher, made for a more popular taste.

Almost all little sculptures are worked by two techniques: wax and encaustic with polychrome treatments. Later, the use of color was dismissed and wax was preferred above all with some limited applications of green. The most common themes were the nature portraits whose models represent social types of the daily life such as musicians with their regional instruments, shepherds, Indians, or models who reflected local professions like dentists, surgeons, shoemakers, etc. Other kinds of iconography include the stereotyped allegories like the Muses - massive and important women with their characteristic instruments decorated in Rocaille; sequences of "continents" which are represented by women; Samson victorious over the Lion, lions with lambs used as paperweights.

The isolation to which Ayacucho fell in the present century, the change in social mobility, and the change in the customers brought about a rapid decline of the Huamanga stone statues. At present, some aids for renewal of the art have already been planned but, because of its artistic complexity and the lack of inspiration, there is a sense of disorientation

and confusion among the artists today.

Text by Sharon Crockett  
Photographs by Roberto Sicre

SLIDES Figures Carved of Stone: Piedra de Huamanga

- 181 A A female figure as the Muse, Calliope, holding a horn decorated in Rocaille.
- 181 B A seated female figure with a book in her lap. This is a later figure with little color added.
- 181 C Adam and Eve in the Garden contemplating the tree of knowledge and the serpent offering the apple.
- 181 D Details of the animals in 181 C. Where did the idea for the elephant originate in Peru?
- 181 E An alabaster animal, a lion. Little color has been used in the figure.
- 181 F A profile of 181 E.
- 181 G This exquisite scene portrays Christ's descent from the Cross. Note the balance of the Cross and ladder against the flow of human figures in the scene.
- 181 H A detail of 181 G showing Christ being lifted from the Cross. Note the details in the figures and drapery.
- 181 I A female figure as Allegory with shield, crown and cannon or chariot in the background decorated in Rocaille.
- 181 J Samson wrestling with a lion. A later figure with little color added.



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AUDIO - VISUAL PROGRAM

SET 182      RETABLOS

In 1941 or 1943, during her trip to Ayacucho, Alicia Bustamante found some small wooden boxes filled with little statues made from plaster which were known as Cajas San Marcos or San Lucas. They were made for indigenous communities which were settled in the south of Huamanga.

Usually, these boxes, now known as Retablos, have one or two doors decorated by bright flowers which would represent the celestial world. Some are divided into two floors: the first (upper) floor contains saints in relief which are identified as the patrons of the animals. (St. Mark is represented by the lion, St. Lucas by the bull, St. Agnes by the goat, St. Anthony by the donkey, and St. John by the sheep along with the condor and statues of shepherds as well as the saints). The bottom level is sometimes illustrated with the "Passion" or the punishment of a little Indian thief by the most common figures from village life.

The Retablos are the expression of the syncretic Peruvian Indian ideology of the peasant life. The "passion" of the little Indian has been interpreted as the symbol of human sacrifice used in the ancient cult for fertility. Its use is manifold: it could be a magic object (hueca) which has the power to communicate with the shrine spirits used in their magic rites.

The Retablos' artistic origins can be traced back to two main artistic classes. The first is the little religious triptych made in alabaster from Ayacucho which represented the Nativity or devotion to the Virgin and Saints. The latter comes from the epigons of the iconographic systems of the art of Cuzco because of its similarity in themes and the distribution of the images.

The first Retablos were carved in stone whose name was Piedra de Huamanga. Because of the hardness, the artisans employed another technique; that of the plaster paste. When Alicia Bustamante discovered this kind of art, it was already fading out and extinct. She suggested the sculptors create new forms, new themes such as dances, bullfights, cockfights, and Nativities.

The imagery of St. John plays an important role in the art of the Retablos as well as the Passion crosses made in wood and representing the Christ face surrounded by the tools of the Passion. The imagery comes from the craftsmanship of the time of the colonies. The work is made of stucco, paste, telaencolada or paper mâché.

The scenes evolved - becoming more crowded and embodying familiar figures of the daily life of the people. This portrait style of incorporating figures from social life of the village can also be found in the Nativities that were created in Naples and in Spain.

Text by Sharon Crockett  
Photographs by Roberto Sicre



## SLIDES RETABLOS

- 182 A A Retablo depicting the Holy Family with Magi. The top of the box symbolizes the celestial world with saints. The box is completely open.
- 182 B A detail of 182 A showing the lid of the Retablo closed.
- 182 C The exterior of the Retablo in 182 A and B. The flowers symbolize the celestial world. The dove floating over the Christ Child represents the Holy Spirit.
- 182 D The lid of the Retablo with figures representing the daily life and people in the community. Notice how much more crowded the figures are - indicating this Retablo was made more recently.
- 182 E The theme of the Retablo is a scene from the Passion of Christ. He carries the cross. Mortal men, the Roman and contemporary figures, are dwarfed by Christ. Angels hover above Christ. The flowers on the door symbolize the celestial world.
- 182 F A detail of 182 E.
- 182 G In this Retablo, local people are on the side, possibly a shepherd with his flock. The central figure is clothed in fur garments yet he carries a cross suggesting a religious subject. The woman holding a baby may be a peasant or she may represent the Virgin.
- 182 H This Retablo shows a Christmas scene. The doors are open. It is divided in two levels: the upper part has the Nativity scene with shepherds, musicians, animals and the three Magi. The lower level represents a country party with musicians and dancers surrounded by animals. On the ceiling, we see the image of the "condor" (the Andean eagle) as a symbol of the Peruvian culture.
- 182 I This Retablo has two levels. Important figures and the main action occurs on the upper level. The figures on the lower level are local townspeople in their daily life. The doors of the Retablo are painted with pastoral scenes.
- 182 J This Retablo is in the shape of a box. The inside of the cover shows two scenes of the funeral of a poor man in two levels. On the upper part, the man is the bigger figure on the table surrounded by friends and women crying. In the lower level, there are figures holding the coffin and others with crowns of flowers - the women cover their heads with a mantilla or shawl.