

NATIONAL
GALLERY OF ART

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WASHINGTON, D.C. October 1, 1965. A ring of gold will be formed at the National Gallery of Art this month as a joint cultural endeavor of Peru and the United States.

More than 150 ceremonial and ornamental gold objects from ancient Peruvian tombs and temples will be exhibited from October 15 through November 28 around the Rotunda of the National Gallery, it was announced today by Director John Walker.

Honorary patrons are President Lyndon B. Johnson and Mrs. Johnson, and President Fernando Belaúnde of Peru.

The collection is valued "beyond any price" by Celso Pastor, Ambassador of Peru to the United States.

Most of the objects have never been outside their own country, and those in the Vicús group, which dates from 100 A.D., are all recent discoveries.

After the showing in Washington, the gold will be seen at the Dallas Museum of Fine Arts (December 18-January 30), the Cleveland Museum of Art (February 19-April 3), the Gallery of Modern Art in New York (April 23-June 5), the Seattle Art Museum (June 25-August 7) and the William Rockhill Nelson Gallery in Kansas City (August 27-October 9).

"The selection was made," Director Walker explained,

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"to show the beauty of the goldsmith's art in Peru, and to provide insight to some of the earliest and most fascinating cultures of our hemisphere."

There will be examples of Peruvian goldwork from five cultures, starting with the ancient Vicús and concluding with the Inca. Among the newly-discovered Vicús objects is a double necklace of gold, shell and turquoise, hammered out 18 centuries ago.

Highly prized in the collection are two intricately-worked gold knives, or tumi, from Lima's National Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology. Their blunt blades are ritual symbols of a more primitive time when sacrifices were still being made.

The collection shows that the early goldsmiths of Peru were far ahead of their European counterparts. Two delightful 4th-century animal figures, for example, were decorated with difficult repoussé designs and ingenious coca leaf pockets - at a time when European craftsmen were on the brink of the dark ages. More than a thousand years later in Florence, the great Cellini professed admiration for the early Peruvian artisans.

Gold had far less commercial value to Peruvians than it did to Europeans. It was prized instead as a religious symbol, a mark of power and a badge of nobility. For the living, it was worked into endless varieties of shapes and sizes to serve as ornaments. For the dead, it decorated tombs and was hammered into masks for the tightly-rolled corpses known as "mummy bundles."

When the Spaniards arrived in the New World, the streets of Lima were actually paved with silver, and the cultural capital of Cusco was receiving annual tribute of 130 tons of gold and 600 tons of silver. Sir Walter Raleigh sent home envious reports of the vast riches of the Spanish colony; other witnesses testified that the treasures of the Incas exceeded all booty in history.

The vast amounts of Peruvian gold and the fine workmanship of Peruvian goldsmiths eventually brought on the greatest gold rush

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the world has ever known. It reached a high point in the 1530's when Pizarro captured King Atahualpa in the city of Cajamarca, traded his life for three rooms of gold and silver, and then killed him anyway. The looting continued almost up to the present, but the Peruvian government is now taking steps to preserve its golden past.

Most of the objects in Atahualpa's enormous ransom were melted down when they were shipped to Spain, but many of the lost treasures would have been like those to be shown at the National Gallery this month.

Lenders to the United States exhibition are: National Museum of Anthropology and Archaeology; Archaeological Museum, University of Cusco; Brüning Museum, Lambayeque; Foundation of the Arts Art Museum, Lima; Elsa Letts de Cohen Museum; Miguel Mujica Gallo Museum; and Domingo Seminario Museum.

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Color transparencies, black-and-white glossy photographs, and catalogue on loan for purposes of publication are available from William W. Morrison, Assistant to the Director, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Area code 202, 737-4215, ext. 247.