

*Peregrinación: Mexican Folk Ceramics* is a vibrant and comprehensive exhibition of Mexico's contemporary folk ceramics. With much emphasis on artist families, regional themes, and community identity, these clay objects narrate the lives of many people and reveal extraordinary imagination, skill, and creative ingenuity that have been passed down through generations. From the intricate cross-hatch *Petatillo* designs of *Tonalá* and the symbolic, baroque-style trees of life of *Izúcar de Matamoros*, to the fanciful and mocking devils of *Ocumichu* and the decadent designs of *Talavera* of *Puebla*, this colorful exhibition is infused with humor and whimsical stories that celebrate the people who represent the very spirit of Mexico. The term, *peregrinación*, meaning ‘pilgrimage’ historically refers to the long journey of the pre-Columbian *Mexica* civilization, later known as the Aztecs, who migrated to the Valley of Mexico. This exhibition invites the viewer to take a pilgrimage and explore twentieth-century Mexican culture.

For centuries, ceramic sculpture and pottery have been a tradition in Mexico. The pre-conquest treasures, dating back to 2000 B.C., have directly influenced the artworks we experience today. During the colonial era, between 1521 and 1650, much of the iconography and design shifted to reflect a synthesis between Mesoamerican ritual, Catholicism, and Spanish influences. After the political and social uprising of the Mexican Revolution from 1910 to 1920 and the influx of diverse cultures during the 1920's and 1930's, arts and crafts became highly stylized to reflect the aesthetic unique to each region. Many of the ceramic production areas that are represented in this exhibition are located in villages that have become well known. Over twenty villages and cities are represented in *Peregrinación*.

This exhibition especially highlights popular festivals and traditions such as Mexico's, *Día de los muertos* (Day of the Dead), which was originally based on Mesoamerican ritual but today has been infiltrated by Christian theology and iconography. In contrast to solemn and somber mourning rituals practiced by many cultures, the *Día de los muertos* festivities are celebrated with joy and humor. Family graves and altars are decorated with *ofrendas* (offerings) embellished with candles, photos, foods, and flowers to commemorate deceased loved ones. Charmingly colorful

and well dressed skeleton figures, originally called *las calaveras catrinas*, have become some of the most recognized Mexican folk icons, thanks to the popular Mexican illustrator Jose Guadalupe Posada, who used the catrina image to communicate with the public. Many potters, especially in *Capula, Michoacán*, continue the catrina tradition by bringing together the imagery of the Mesoamerican worship of the dead and turn of the century French influences. Other ceramic works include masks, skulls, tree of life sculptures, devils, animals, imaginative spirit figures, whimsical tableaux, and religious icons such as Our Lady of Guadalupe, Catholic Saints, and nativity figures. Also included are examples of the famous *Talavera* ware from *Puebla*, a style that was influenced by the Spanish *Majolica* tradition at the beginning of the Colonial period.

Contemporary Mexican ceramics continue the visual legacy of a rich past, capturing the physical relationships to nature, agriculture, indigenous myths, and sacred rituals—visual languages and wisdom that allow us to remember the stories of our ancestors and origins.

Karen Crews

October, 2010

American Museum of Ceramic Art