CAPTURING THE SUN
Master Craftsmen of Ancient Mesoamerica
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The allure of gold adornments is universal and eternal. Gold possesses a power that captures the eye with even the slightest glimmer. Gold is magical in that it is inert and therefore never oxidizes, remaining lustrous and beautiful throughout time.

It must have been thrilling for indigenous Mesoamerican people to come upon this precious, magical metal in riverbeds, and in veins exposed in the soil. Similar to the contemporary world, they were concerned with social status; the function of their adornments was to indicate wealth and an elevated position in society, as well as having religious significance. Rulers wore gold crowns and were buried in gold masks. Priests used gold utensils and dressed in clothing laced with gold. The elite classes adorned themselves with gold and silver ornamentation that could be seen at a distance, displaying their status through opulence, asserting their divine authority to make the transformation to the next world, when their time came.

There were three major gold-producing centers in the New World. The first was in Peru, which is the earliest site containing evidence of gold use. Splendid first millennium BCE hammered gold plaques from the Chavín de Huantar Horizon (900 to 200 BCE) reveal complex mythological iconography. The Moche (Mochica) were very competent metalsmiths as well. They were the first to develop the technique of lost wax casting and cultivate the use of alloys, which allowed them to master three-dimensional forms.

The second established gold-producing center extended from Colombia, Ecuador, and Venezuela and included Panama and Costa Rica. Here many different cultures developed, each with their own distinct style. However, they shared similarities in taking forms from nature, casting birds, alligators, frogs, and other animals, as well as geometric forms. In Colombia, the earliest goldworkers were from Calima, in the western part of the country near the Rio Cauca, and were most likely influenced by the Moche. The Muisca occupied an area in the central highlands (modern day Bogotá) and were relatively isolated, allowing them to develop an independent style of abstract “stick” figures, known as túnjos.

The Tairona had a distinct goldworking tradition and mastered an extremely fine wire braiding technique. They are famous for constructing large gold warrior figures with elaborate plumage. Costa Rican and Panamanian gold art objects were extremely similar in style due to proximity and trade. Sometimes these finely detailed zoomorphic objects are referred to by historians as the “International Style” because they look so alike it is unclear from which artistic region they emerged.

In this catalogue you will see a few fine examples of silver work. Unlike today, silver was scarce in antiquity, as it had to be mined. Therefore, it had a higher value—perhaps higher than gold. Whereas gold was equated with the sun, silver was symbolic of the moon and water’s regenerative properties.

It was devastating to pre-Columbian cultures when the conquistadors and colonial rulers looted as much gold and silver as they could and melted it down to send back to Europe. No one knows how many masterful works of art were destroyed. It will remain one of history’s great mysteries and tragedies. Pre-Columbian gold and silver artifacts are rare in today’s marketplace. We are lucky to have a small percentage of these precious artifacts surviving today.

The technical mastery required to produce such sophisticated artifacts in gold and silver is worthy of deep investigation. Ancient pre-Columbian master craftsmen were as skilled at lost-wax casting, hammering, repoussé work, depletion gilding, and incising as any other cultures at the time, or since. The timelessness, beauty and ingenuity of these objects is as evident and relevant today as it was in ancient times.
2. COSTA RICAN GOLD AVIAN BIRD PENDANT
c. 400 to 800 CE
Cast with splayed wings, loop hole for suspension, hook nose, and scrolliate headdress.
Size: 4¾ inches H; 80 grams.
Ex Sotheby’s, New York; Ex Jerrie Cobb Foundation

3. COSTA RICAN GOLD ZOOMORPHIC BIRD PENDANT
c. 800 to 1200 CE
A gold and copper alloy bird-man hybrid deity pendant depicted with long bird wings, arms, and paddle-type feet. Large round beaded eyes, spiral ornaments with side crests, and large hooked beak.
Suspension loop on the back of neck.
Size: 3⅜ inches H x 3⅜ inches L; 49.2 grams.
Ex Cora & Laurence C. Witten II collection, Florida, #CR279
4. INTERNATIONAL STYLE GOLD PECTORAL
Possibly Colombia, ca. 600 to 800 CE

A large and heavy circular device with two small attachment holes near the raised hub center and pie crust motif around the exterior.
Size: 6 7/8 inches D; 130 grams.
Ex private American collection

5. TAIRONA ROCK CRYSTAL BEAD AND GOLD NOSE ORNAMENT NECKLACE
Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia ca. 800 to 1200 CE

Beautiful polished translucent barrel shape quartz beads with 14 gold balls interspersed and central bat wing heavy gold nose ornament as pendant.
Size of pendant 5 3/4 inches W; necklace is 18 inches L.
Restrung and wearable with modern closure.
Ex Jerrie Cobb Foundation; Sotheby’s New York
6. CALIMA GOLD AND MOCHE TURQUOISE STONE BEAD NECKLACE
Colombia and Peru, Ca. 400 to 1000 CE
Balanced composition of gold spheres, stylized faces and a central bird with openwork fantail interspersed with ancient natural blue stones.
Size: 20 inches L. Restrung and wearable with modern closure. Ex Jean-Eugene Lions collection, Geneva, Switzerland

7. MASSIVE TAIRONA GOLD NOSE RING
Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta, Colombia, ca. 1000 to 1500 CE
Curved shape, high-karat yellow gold nose ornament with large capped termini and red cinnabar pigment.
Size: 1 1/4 inches W; 55.1 grams. Ex Poway, California private collection
8. IMPRESSIVE QUIMBAYA GOLD PENDANT OF A LORD IN A TRANCE

Colombia, Gulf of Urubá, ca. 500 to 1000 CE

Cast wearing a crown, elaborate nose ornament, and necklace. An ancient repair was made to the lower left knee. The Urubá region is located on the Colombian/Panamanian border and was influenced by the Quimbaya people with later influences from the Sinú.

Size: 6⅜ inches H; 91.4 grams
Ex New York private collection

9. QUIMBAYA GOLD FIGURAL PENDANT & QUARTZ BEAD NECKLACE

Colombia, ca. 500 to 1000 CE

A high-karat solid standing human figure with a bird on his head as a central pendant. The strand with gold and stone native beads. This would have been worn by the elite class, quite possibly even a shaman as the iconography suggests. Compare with similar example in Gold of El Dorado, W. Bray, figure 404, p. 198.

Size of figure: 1⅜ inches H; 24 grams
Necklace: 18 inches L, wearable and with a modern closure
Ex private New York collection
10. QUIMBAYA TRIANGULAR GOLD NOSE ORNAMENT
Colombia, ca. 500 to 1000 CE
Hammered curved flattened form and with raised and scrollate designs.
Size: 5¾ inches W; 15.4 grams.
Ex private collection of J.H., Poway, California

11. QUIMBAYA CRESCENT SHAPE GOLD NOSE RING
Colombia, ca. 500 to 1000 CE
A hammered gold nose ring with a modern pin affixed to the back.
Size: 2½ inches W; 20.2 grams.
Ex Harmer Rooke, Ex Jerrie Cobb Foundation

12. QUIMBAYA GOLD FROG PENDANT
Colombia, ca. 500 to 1000 CE
A cast yellow gold frog pendant crouching on rear legs and with paddle feet. Front legs each bear a suspension loop. Well-formed body enhanced by applied ball eyes and nostrils. The frog, easily at home in both water and land, was symbolic for fertility and rebirth.
Size: 1⅞ inches L; 22.6 grams.
Ex private American collection
13. SINÚ GOLD AVIAN BIRD PENDANT
Sinú River region, Colombia, ca. 800 to 1400 CE
A beautiful bird in flight, with hooked beak, symmetrical wings, and tail fan. A large example worn by the noble class, which the iconography suggests. Compare similar example in Goldwork and Shamanism, page 84, by Reichel-Dolmatoff.
Size: 5 inches W x 4⅞ inches L; 96.8 grams.
Ex private American collection

14. SINÚ GOLD BIRD STAFF FINIAL
Colombia, ca. 800 to 1400 CE
The alert bird stands erect on socket with stippled head, circular eyes, long beak, folded wings and fan tail.
Size: 3¼ inches L; 49.3 grams.
Ex Poway, California private collection

15. SINÚ GOLD ALLOY BIRD STAFF FINIAL
Colombia, Sinú river region, ca. 800 to 1400 CE
The bird stands erect on socket with long beak, long legs, slit circular eyes, wings folded under and fan tail with applied feathers.
Size: 3 inches H; 38.9 grams.
Ex Poway, California private collection
16. IMPRESSIVE LARGE SINÚ GOLD NOSE/NECK ORNAMENT
Colombia, ca. 800 to 1400 CE
A sizable hammered adornment for a noble personage with a roughly heart shape and open in the middle with ample long tabs to go through the pierced septum.
Size: 9½ inches W x 8 inches H; 120.1 grams.
Ex Poway, California private collection

17. SINÚ GOLD COVERED SHELL FORM LIME CONTAINER
Colombia, ca. 800 to 1400 CE
A seashell covered and embossed in gold; the opening at the top contains crushed lime from antiquity! This should be considered drug paraphernalia, as lime was used to aid in digestion of coca leaves.
Size: 4 inches L; 53.4 grams.
Ex Poway, California private collection

18. SINÚ PAIR GOLD FILIGREE EARRINGS
Colombia, ca. 800 to 1400 CE
Made in a delicate lost-wax technique. Each a delicate semicircular open weave with a row of small idealized birds perched atop corners.
Size: each 3 inches W; 32.8 grams.
combined weight
Ex Poway, California private collection
19. TOLIMA GOLD ZOOMORPHIC
TRANSFORMATION FIGURE
Malagana region, Colombia, ca. 300 to 500 CE
A sizable casting with multiple levels of
iconography and symbolism. The main figure is a
feline form with fanged mouth. Birds and other
animal motifs are present at different levels as
the piece is turned, illustrated right.
Size: 3½ inches L; An impressive 99 grams.
Ex Victor Cano, Sr. collection

20. URUBÁ GOLD
BIRD PENDANT WITH
DANGLERS
Colombia, Gulf of Urubá, ca.
500 to 1000 CE
The bird has its wings arched
to its sides and a flared tail and
four square plaques suspended
on the two bars. Well-cast with
evidence of the carbon core
intact. Quite unique.
Size: 3½ inches H; 33.6 grams.
Ex New York private collection
21. TALL MUISCA GOLD FIGURAL TUNJO
Colombia, ca. 1000 to 1400 CE
A stylized flattened figural form with characteristic wire-like limbs against the flat body silhouette. The tunjo is a classic example of the minimal and elegant style of Muisca gold work. A depiction of a figure with a staff or weapon is a typical sign of rulership or status.
Size: 4⅜ inches H; 12.1 grams
Ex Darien, Connecticut collection

22. PAIR MUISCA GOLD FIGURAL TUNJOS
Colombia, ca. 1000 to 1400 CE
Two individual abstract flattened figural stick forms, each holding an implement close to body.
Sizes: 2½ inches L; 6 grams & 2-1/4 inches L; 3 grams
Ex private California collection

23. PAIR OF GOLD NARIÑO ORNAMENTS WITH STYLIZED ANIMALS
Colombia, ca. 1000 to 1400 CE
Embossed with geometric and figural designs, quite probably depicting monkeys, pierced for suspension.
Size: 3¼ inches D; 20 grams total
Ex Jerrie Cobb Foundation

24. FOUR NARIÑO GOLD CIRCULAR APPLIQUÉS
Colombia, Capulí region, ca. 1000 to 1400 CE
Each disc, convex with rounded center and beaded perimeter, is pierced for suspension.
Sizes: 2⅛ to 3½ inch D + custom presentation mount. 13.6 grams to 14.2 grams each
Ex Jerrie Cobb Foundation
25. NARIÑO GOLD CIRCULAR DISC WITH HUMAN HEAD
Colombia, ca. 1000 to 1400 CE
A heavy gold disc with human face displaying coiffure and ear ornaments, within a circular framework. Pierced for suspension.
Size: 5¼ inches D; 39 grams.
Ex J Cobb, Ex Sotheby’s NY

26. NARIÑO GOLD CIRCULAR DISC WITH MONKEYS
Colombia, ca. 1000 to 1400 CE
Flat hammered gold disc with twin monkeys embossed opposite a medial line. Pierced for suspension.
Size: 4½ inches D; 34.7 grams.
Ex Jerrie Cobb Foundation

27. NARIÑO GOLD CIRCULAR DISC DEPICTING A COCA CHEWER
Colombia, ca. 1000 to 1400 CE
A sizeable gold disc with human face displaying coiffure, ear ornaments, bulge in cheek, within a circular framework. Pierced for suspension.
Size: 3¾ inches D; 23.5 grams.
Ex Jerrie Cobb Foundation

28. CALIMA GOLD TWEEZERS
Colombia, ca. 500 to 800 CE
The tool made of thick, hammered, high karat, yellow gold in a curved shape culminating in an ovoid tweezers head.
Size: 1¼ inches L; 9.4 grams.
Ex Poway, California collection
29. THREE MOCHE GOLD APPLIQUÉ DISCS WITH WARRIORS
North Coast Peru, ca. 400 to 600 CE
Circular pierced appliqué discs with standing figures, each holding weapons and wearing belts and headdresses and within a border with raised hubs. Each disc is pierced for attachment.
Size: each disk measures 3 inches D; total 58.8 grams
Ex Lawrence C. Witten II, Florida collection. Acquired 1980s

30. TAIRONA GOLD ALLOY CREATURE LABRET (LIP PLUG)
Colombia, ca. 800 to 1400 CE
A cast copper and gold alloy of a lizard-like headed creature expelling a bifurcated plume. Fine filigree work and details. Loop holes for attachment.
Size: 1⅜ inches L; 4.9 grams
Nice surface oxidation.
Ex Poway, California collection

31. MOCHE GOLD APPLIQUÉ OF A DEITY HEAD
North Coast Peru, ca. 400 to 600 CE
A hollow pierced ornament in the form of a face with grimaced expression and little owls all around. Once inlaid.
Size: 1⅜ inches H; 7.3 grams
Ex W Steinberg collection, London
33. CHIMÚ DISC SHAPE
OPENWORK GOLD EAR
ORNAMENT
North Coast Peru, ca. 600 to 1200 CE
A large round pendant depicting a central monkey deity with large headdress, flanked by two monkeys with staffs, top of one monkey missing.
Size: 3¼ inches D.
Ex Darien, Connecticut private collection

32. PAIR OF CHIMÚ
GOLD APPLIQUÉS:
MUSICIANS AND
ATTENDANTS
North Coast Peru, ca. 600 to 1200 CE
Two near matched annealed sheet gold ornament groups, each depicting a central figure with a headdress, tunic, earrings, and nose ring holding bells in each hand, flanked by two smaller figures with large headdresses/ crowns. Cut and appliqué construction.
Size: 2 inches W x 2 inches H.
Ex Darien, Connecticut private collection
34. CHIMÚ GOLD REPOUSSÉ BOWL  
North Coast Peru, ca. 600 to 1200 CE  
Ornately decorated with four repoussé panels and borders with monkeys, birds, felines and with stippling motifs. Often these were found placed on the head, like helmets, in elite burial settings.  
Size: 4 inches D; 12.6 grams.  
Provenance: Jerrie Cobb Foundation; Ex Sotheby’s NY

35. VICÚS GOLD TWEEZERS WITH ELEGANT SPIRALS  
North Coast Peru, ca. 300 BCE to 300 CE  
An elegant nose ornament of crescent shape with four wire spirals expertly soldered on each end.  
Size: 6 inches W; 36.7 grams.  
Ex New York private collection

36. INCA GOLD MASK  
Southern Highlands of Peru, ca. 1200 to 1300 CE  
A beaten sheet of gold with protruding nose and diamond shaped eyes. There are 20 punched holes around perimeter which was used to sew the mask to a mummy bundle for the afterlife. Traces of the original cinnabar on the surface.  
Size: 6½ inches H x 7½ inches W; 54 grams.  
Ex private American collection
37. LAMBAYEQUE SILVER MASK
North Coast Peru, ca. 800 to 1100 CE
A flattened hammered mask with large slanted eyes, long ears with flares, protruding nose and with applied danglers. According to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, many Andean peoples placed masks as false faces on the mummy bundles of important individuals. Depending on the status and wealth of the deceased, the masks could be of wood, ceramic, or cloth; those of the most powerful were of gold and silver.
Size: 12 inches W x 8 inches H; 88 grams. Ex G. Evans, Massachusetts

38. LAMBAYEQUE SILVER EAR SPOOLS
North Coast Peru, ca. 800 to 1100 CE
Matched pair of large silver ear spools, each decorated in relief with a stylized spider with a small bird in its stomach.
Size: 2 ¼ inch D. each; 58.7 grams. Ex Jean-Eugène Lions collection, Geneva, Switzerland, no #913

39. INCA SILVER KERO
Peru, ca. 1200 to 1400 CE
Deep hammered wide rim vessel with head in high relief, well-defined ears and necklace, strong nose and almond-shaped eyes.
Size: 7 inches H; 120 grams. Ex Adam Hutter, New York collection
40. MOCHICA COPPER MASK
Loma Negra, Peru, ca. 300 BCE to 300 CE
A well-defined facial mask with realistic features in deep repoussé. Large almond-shaped eyes, each with brow outlined and naturalistic regal protruding nose. Original surface with green cupric oxide patination.
Size: 10⅛ inches L.
Ex Sotheby’s New York, 1972
Published in Alan Lapiner’s Art of the Four Quarters.

41. VICÚS SILVER CAT HEAD ORNAMENT
Peru, ca. 100 BCE to 400 CE
A thick sheet of copper gold alloy in the form of a feline face maskette depicted with rounded perked ears, round low-relief eyes and nose with perforated nostrils, open toothy mouth.
Four perforations around the outer rim for attachment.
Size: 4 inches H x 3⅝ inches W.
Ex New York collection, acquired in the 1970s.

42. MOCHICA COPPER JAGUAR MASKETTE
Loma Negra, Peru, Early to Middle.
Moche, ca. 300 BCE to 300 CE
A hammered maskette, probably a center piece for a diadem or headdress, depicting a jaguar with rounded perked ears, shell inset teeth and eyes.
Size: 1¾ inches H.
Ex Blum Antiques, New York, acquired in the 1980s.
ART FOR ETERNITY

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BIBLIOGRAPHY
