

BREAK OR BLEND



THE EXPLORATION OF HYBRIDIZATION IN
NEW WORLD AND OLD WORLD RELIGION

Curated by Morgan Ogilvie

**Dedicated to my favorite
editor, my mother**

**Break or Blend:
The Exploration of Hybridization
in New World and
Old World Religion**

**A Digital Exhibition hosted
by The Nora Eccles Harrison
Museum of Art**

Curated by Morgan Ogilvie



Morgan Ogilvie is an art major working her way towards a graphic design degree at Utah State University. Ogilvie was inspired by the complex history of Christianity in Latin America, and wanted to show its effects though the art that was being produced over the course of its art history. Her goal is to have this exhibit of the hybridization of religions be as eye-opening to the public as it was for her while researching it.

Break or Blend

In the hostile takeover of The New World, the religious beliefs of both Old World Christianity and New World Paganism twisted together to form a hybrid religion of both. “Break or Blend” is an exhibition that explores the effects of Christianity on the New World through the lens of artwork that was produced before, during, and after colonization. Throughout the exhibition, you will be noticing the changes in figural representation of divinity in these pieces. The changes pertain not only to native religions, but also to how Christianity shifted to be more palatable to the native population. The effects of colonization and Christianity can be found in all corners of Latin America, and this exhibit presents the unique and complex relationship it has with Christianity and its accompanying devotional imagery.

Carefully selected art pieces demonstrate this shift of imagery of the divine. One example being the “Virgen de Guadalupe”, also famously referred to as “The Dark Skinned Madonna” due to her being depicted with a darker skin tone than what was traditionally used in European representations of the Virgin Mary, the appearance of the “Virgen de Guadalupe” is one of the major kickstarts to the rise of Christianity in Mexico. This exhibition has select examples from different periods of past Latin American artwork up to the present day to showcase this morphology of devotional imagery, with the ultimate goal of bringing more attention to the complexities of the hybridization of New World Paganism and Old World Christianity.



Scan QR code for a link to the digital exhibition

Artist Unknown

“Coatlicue”

Tenochtitlan, Mexico City

Basalt

Late Classical

A depiction of an Aztec Earth goddess and mother deity known as “Coatlicue”. Also known also as “She of the Serpentskirt”, as seen by the snakes that are carved to form her skirt. A terrifying and powerful goddess of the earth. She is an example of how pre-Columbian gods had a cyclical and dichotomous nature in their depictions, such as life, death, and rebirth. When contrasted with more straightforward and one-sided Christian saints and martyrs. Coatlicue is a physical manifestation of both life and death, mother and warrior, The significance of this statue in “Break or Blend” is tied to her later connections with the “Virgen de Guadalupe”, who is also known as “She who crushes the serpents head”, a deliberate allegory of Christianity coming to Latin America to crush their gods and instill their own.





Artist Unknown
“The Great Goddess”
Tetitla Compound, Teotihuacan
Fresco
Classical

The civilization that lived within Teotihuacan outdates the Aztecs by hundreds of years, the details surrounding their gods and religious practices being comparatively more obscure. But even with this gap in time, there are different things we can infer through careful study of common trends found in pre-Columbian religion. The figures within the fresco are interpreted to be a depiction of a goddess of life with two attendants on either side of her. It is also hypothesized to be a representation of the nearby dormant volcano, with the mass coming from her hands and mouth being a possible retelling of a past eruption. This blending of both god and event is something that can exist in tandem to each other rather than disproving one or the other.

**Artist Unknown , “*Virgen de Guadalupe*”
Basilica of Guadalupe, Mexico City
Oil on Cactus Cloth
16th Century, Colonial**

Also known as “The Dark Skinned Madonna”, the *Virgen de Guadalupe* is a prime example of the beginnings of the hybridization of New and Old World religions. The original artist is unknown, but the Virgin holds a very strong following in many parts of Latin America with many devout followers in Mexico City, with nearly 10 million visitors to her shrine yearly. Her origin stems from the visions a native peasant of Chichimeca had of her, Juan Diego. The Virgin communicated with him via his native language of Nahuatl, and when Juan Diego asked her name, she responded “*Tlecuatlecupe*”, which translates to “She who crushes the serpent”. Possible correlations of this translation correlates with both the snake that lured Eve to the forbidden apple, and the Old World goddess Coatlicue, “She of the serpent skirt”.





Melchiorre Cafà
“Santa Rosa of Lima”
Iglesia de Santo Domingo, Lima
Marble
1665, Colonial

A marble statue commissioned to commemorate Saint Rosa of Lima, the first Latin American saint this piece is often compared to Bernini’s “The Ecstasy of St. Teresa”. The argument being that the faces of both Rosa and Teresa have an “orgasmic” expression. The comparisons between earlier art movements being brought over to the New World and then subsequently criticized for being “derivative” is a common theme in much of the religious art being produced in Latin America at the time. Even with the claims of derivative, his piece is significant to the exhibits themes of hybridization in part due to St. Rosa being the first Saint of the New world. It signifies one the most important steps in the indoctrination process; having the people see themselves within the faith.



**Miguel Cabrera,
“The Virgin of the Apocalypse”
Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico
Oil on Canvas
1760, Colonial**

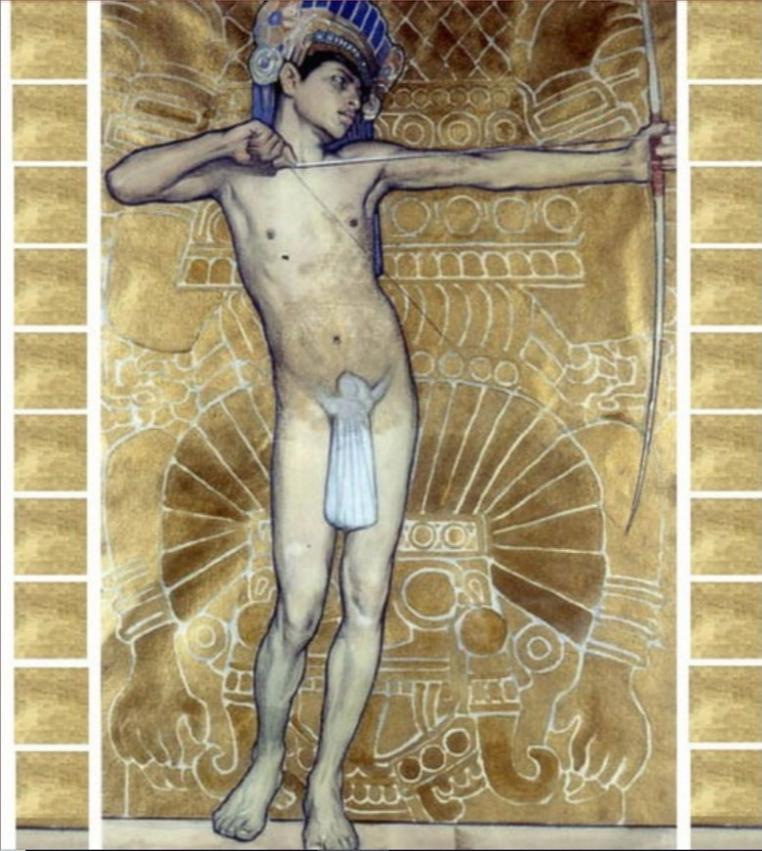
A reflection of the power the Christian Church had over Latin America, and another example of work criticized for its similarities to a preexisting Old World artwork. In this case, Cabrerra’s piece being compared to Flemish painter Peter Paul Rubens “The Virgin as the Woman of the Apocalypse”. While the woman in the painting is a more traditional depiction of the virgin Mary would be for fitting for Rubens’ piece, it is more likely that in Cabrera’s piece that it would be The Virgen de Guadalupe. The crushing of the serpents head holds more meaning to The Virgin’s “She who crushes the serpent” moniker than it would the Old World’s Virgin Mary. Another factor to consider are the stars that around the womans head, another common signifier of the New World’s Virgin. Cabrera is using pre-existing examples of religious devotional imagery to showcase the the unique intricacies of New World Christianity.



**Cladio de Arciniega, "Mexico City Cathedral"
Mexico City, Mexico
Chiluca, stone, tezontle
1573-1818, Colonial**

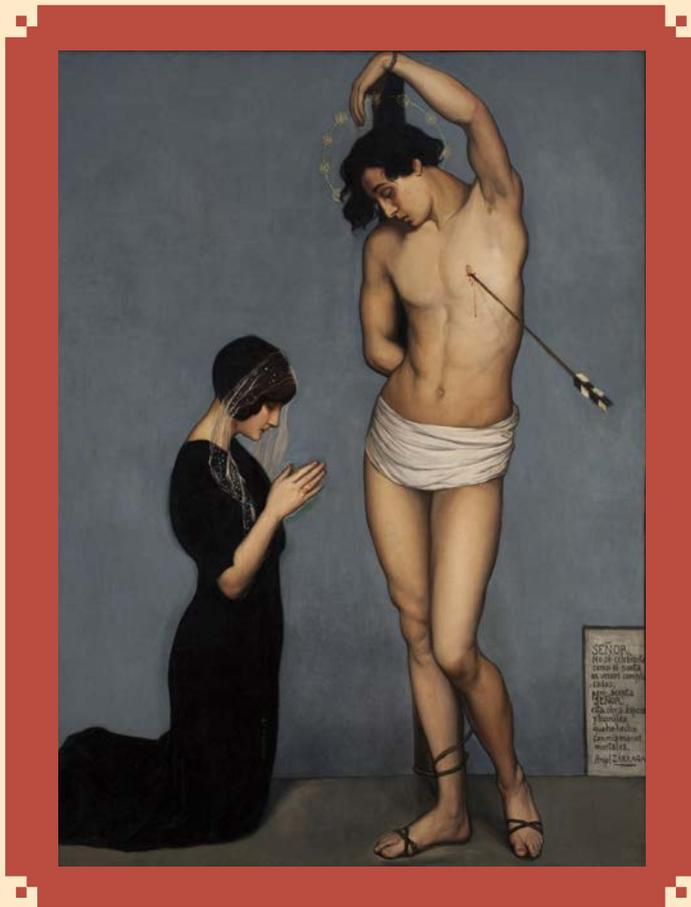


One of the oldest standing cathedrals in Mexico City. “The Mexico City Cathedral” at first glance may seem like the thing that would represent this exhibits themes of hybridization, as the interior and exterior are heavily Eurocentric in style and architecture, but taking a closer look at the history of the Cathedral shows that not every connection to Latin America’s Pre-Colonial past is immediately noticeable. The building is cannibalized from the stones of the Aztec templo Mayor, a temple built within the center Tenochtitlan. The temple, named “Huetecalli” by the Aztecs, was built on land that was already considered sacred, thus making the temple sacred. It is an interesting irony that despite being destroyed to build “The Mexico City Cathedral”, it was rebuilt for the same idea; a sacred place to worship something sacred.



**Saturnino Herrán, “El Flechador”, Pencil on Watercolor
1917, Modernism**

Saturnino Herrán’s “El Flechador” is a merging of European and Pre-Colonial Latin American art aesthetics. The most apparent thing of note is that the background and the clothing of the figure are purposefully painted to have a Pre-Columbian style to it, such as the loincloth and ornate headdress of the figure and the creature in the background bearing similarity to old gods of the New World. The s-like pose the figure is in however is very reminiscent of European contrapposto. The merging of these different art directions result in mingling of Old and New World sentiments, while still pushing forward to create a fresh cultural identity from both backgrounds.



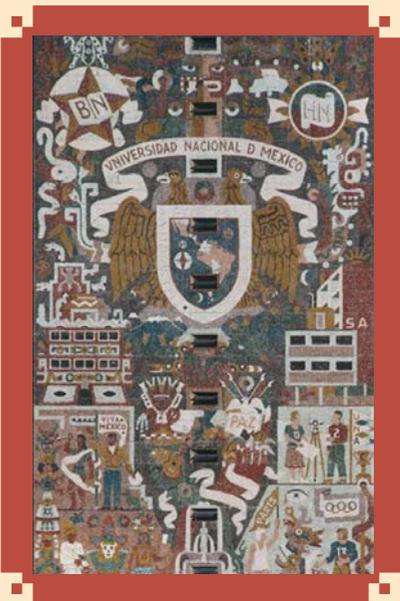
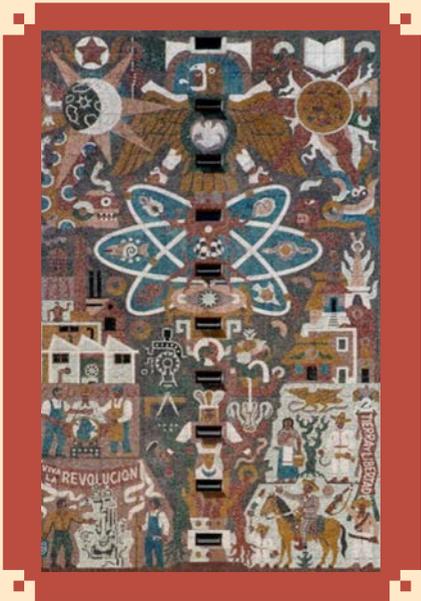
Ángel Zárraga, “Ex voto, San Sebastian”
Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico, Oil on Canvas
1910, Modernism

Zarraga’s depiction of Saint Sebastian in this piece is something that is sensual and borderline sacrilegious. The term “ex voto” is a form of a heartfelt prayer or wish, as well as an offering to fulfill it. A common method of enacting an “ex voto” is by making a painting with a prayer written within it. The prayer in this piece is found in the bottom right corner of the image, the practice of offerings in exchange of a miracle is something more related to paganistic practices, yet the care and beauty Zarraga put into Sebastian’s form is something akin to the traditional depictions of European virginal martyrs. This piece as a whole is a conscious effort to blend traditions found in the New World, with art aesthetics of the Old World, to create something unique.



**Juan O' Gorman, “*Representacion Historica de la Cultura*”
UNAM Central Library, Mexico, Colored Stone Mosaic
1956, Muralism**

This mural encapsulates the cultural history of Mexico, and the main themes of “Break or Blend”. While the South facing mural, “The Colonial Past”, was the focus of the exhibition, O’Gorman made each side of the building represent a point in Mexico’s history. The North Facade depicts the Pre-Hispanic Past, the East being the status of the world at large, and the West facade representing the Future for Mexico. The entire piece is made to encapsulate a Pre-Columbian “primitivism” art aesthetic, while intermingling Christian iconography, such as the two large hands bearing stigmata. This piece is a look at Mexico’s complicated past with colonialism, and an acknowledgement that its current religious identity is intertwined not only with its Pre-Columbian roots, but also it’s distinctive contributions to New World Christianity.



A special thanks to NEHMA, if not with their help, this digital exhibit would not be possible!



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Break or Blend is on display January to May 2023
