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THE CERAMICS OF TONALÁ

Next FAC exhibition honors the pottery-making legacy of a thousand years

COLORADO SPRINGS (Nov. 19, 2010) – The Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, in collaboration with the Consulate General of Mexico and the Mexican Cultural Center in Denver, will present an exhibition of over 100 works by contemporary Mexican ceramic artists from Tonalá, which opens Dec. 11.

Legacy of a Thousand Years: The Ceramics of Tonalá

Dec. 11, 2010 – Feb. 27, 2011

North Events, Seagraves Galleries

Admission: FREE for FAC Members; \$10 for non-members

These ceramic artists draw upon a thousand of years of tradition. Tonalá is a small city outside of Guadalajara in the Mexican state of Jalisco, where potters fused together ancient and modern techniques to produce a regional tradition that boasts 10 different styles of finishes with rich colors and distinctive decorative details.

“The remarkable execution of these works, and the beautiful imagery depicting a rich variety of real and fantastic forms show the aesthetic and technical mastery achieved by these artists, considered some of the best ceramicists in Mexico today,” said FAC Curator Tariana Navas-Nieves. “A large exhibition focusing on contemporary Tonalá ceramics has not travelled to the United States since the early 1960s, so this is truly a wonderful opportunity for us.”

Artists featured in the exhibition include: José Luis Cortez Hernández, Fernando Jimón Melchor, Juan Modesto Peña Castro, Benjamín Olvera Nogal, Brígido Pérez Ramos, Juan José Ramos Medrano, José Angel Santos Juárez, Sergio Pérez Arana, Gilberto Díaz Jarero, Antonio Mateos Suárez, Pablo Tamos Lucano, and more.

“The works in this exhibition are absolutely delightful,” said Sam Gappmayer, FAC President and CEO. “This is going to be a great exhibit for families with children during the holiday season.”

The ceramic production in Tonalá, known as the authentic mestizo ceramic is symbolic of Mexico’s identity. Made of burnished clay or scented clay, these artistic objects are created for ordinary and decorative use. The tradition comes from the Tonalteca group, which used clay to produce polished forms. The firsts designs of these ceramics were inspired by forms found in nature such as vegetables and roots. The bright hues used for burnishing the objects originated from the powdered colorful and scented clay found in Mexican soil.

During colonial times, the production of pottery incorporated decoration techniques brought by the Augustinian missionaries in the 17th century. The missionaries introduced ceramic glaze that began to be used along with the original burnishing method. Tonalá ceramics became an important part of the decoration of wealthy houses in Spain, for their fragrance, color and design. They were considered luxury objects brought from the Americas.

Today, the artisans of Tonalá still use the burnishing techniques of their pre-Hispanic ancestors, fused with colonial styles. The result is sophisticated ceramics that have become an important part of Mexico's artistic traditions.

Continuity of Tradition

The four most common finishing methods used in Tonalá are *bruñido* (burnished) clay, *bandera* (flag) clay, *petatillo* (woven straw) clay, and *canelo* (cinnamon) clay.

Another lasting continuity of tradition is the imagery that spans pre-Hispanic times to contemporary work. For example, the Tonalá artistic tradition depicts the *nahual* as a large, jaguar-like cat with a smiling face. The *nahual* is a shamanic shape shifter who moves between the human and animal worlds.

Now emblematic of the region, the *flor* de Tonalá (Tonalá flower) appeared at the start of the 20th century with an oval center surrounded by petals that form a scalloped floral design.

Legacy of a Thousand Years: The Ceramics of Tonalá is sponsored by El Pomar Foundation and *The Gazette*.

Also on View

In the first-floor Blessing Family Gallery, the Fine Arts Center presents [Color, Whimsy and Humor: Popular Mexican Ceramics](#), works from the FAC Permanent Collection. The *Denver Post* wrote, "The 29 playful, festively decorated clay sculptures draw on a variety of folk traditions and take the form of everything from fanciful animals to masked figures, ornate candelabras and even a miniature bullfighting arena. They are handsomely arranged in a gallery boisterously decorated to match ... "entertaining and down-to-earth" ... "a visual carnival that anyone can enjoy."

Fine Arts Center

The Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, established in 1936, is a privately funded, non-profit art museum, performing arts theatre and arts education school. Built on the foundation of the prestigious Broadmoor Art Academy, the FAC carries the legacy of Colorado's arts and cultural heritage. One of 16 charter members of the American Association of Museums, the FAC offers the best in the world of visual arts via its permanent collection and travelling exhibitions, performing arts through the FAC Theatre Company, and arts education with the Bemis School of Art. The FAC building is considered an architectural landmark in the Rocky Mountain region, designed by John Gaw Meem, and is listed on the National Register for Historical Places. In 2007, the FAC unveiled a \$28.6 million renovation and expansion. Visit csfineartscenter.org.

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