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REASSESSING THE INDIGENOUS
AMERICAN HERITAGE IN ITALY

The American Southwest Museum – Enzo Larry Vescia Collection

Via Fabio Filzi 18, 21030 Cuveglio (VA)

Form compiled by Michele Gibin (Director), in collaboration with Caterina Francesca Fidanza

Introduction

The museum preserves and displays the collection of Lorenzo “Larry” Vescia, consisting of 332 artefacts from Indigenous groups from different cultural areas, predominantly from the Southwest, as well as 66 pre-Columbian ceramics from Mexico and from Arizona, New Mexico and Colorado.

The collection is divided into two main sections: on the one hand the artefacts labelled “Native American” and, on the other, the equipment of the pioneers. In addition, there are a variety of heterogeneous objects linked to the memory of Vescia.

The museum is organised as an educational exhibition itinerary that retraces the main moments in the history and culture of the peoples of the Southwest/Oasis America. The installation includes a scale reconstruction of a traditional kiva.

The Vescia collection, on the commission of the municipal administration of Cuveglio, was evaluated by Professor Charles A. Dailey of the American Institute of Indian Arts (AIAI) in Santa Fe, NM (USA).

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The Museum also includes a smaller collection, the Colonna collection, a legacy of Mr Fabrizio Colonna, consisting of 35 artefacts referable to peoples from the Southwest/Oasis America and the Great Plains.

Cultural Areas (tags)

Great Plains; Plateau; Southwest; Mesoamerica

Collections

#01

<i>Name of the collection</i>	Lorenzo “Larry” Vescia collection
<i>Collector</i>	Vescia, Lorenzo “Larry” (1927–1989)
<i>Cultural areas</i>	Great Plains; Plateau; Southwest; Mesoamerica
<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Great Plains: Niitsítapi (Blackfoot) (USA) Plateau: Nimíipuu (Nez Perce) (USA) Southwest/Oasisamerica: Hohokam, Mogollon, Hopi, Diné (Navajo), Apache, Yaqui (USA) Mesoamerica: Teotihuacan, Zapotec, P’urhépecha, Jalisco (Mexico)
<i>Description of the Collection</i>	In the Mesoamerican section, mention should be made of several pre-Columbian ceramics, among which stands out a Zapotec funerary urn (AD 600–800), from the Oaxaca area (Mexico), probably from the site of Monte

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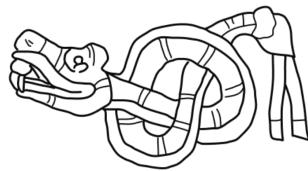
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Albán (Xoo or Monte Albán IV phase). The urn depicts an anthropomorphic figure with a prominent jaguar-head headdress, a necklace of beads adorned with two ears of maize and a pectoral with a glyph. As regards the Southwest/Oasisamerica, noteworthy are some Ancestral Pueblo ceramics attributable to the Hohokam and Mogollon cultures. Among these we find Tusayan Lino Grey terracottas (Basketmaker II-III period); a polychrome Villa Ahumada jar (AD 1000-1300) from the Casas Grandes area (Chihuahua); a large polychrome bowl from Casas Grandes with a spiral “kiva stairs” motif (AD 1300-1400); a bowl in Gila polychrome style (Phoenix White Mountains – Hohokam); a black-on-white olla (AD 1000-1100) from the Ancestral Pueblo area, with a bullseye spiral decoration, originating from the Rio Puerco Valley or from Zuni.

Of particular interest is a Navajo rug from New Mexico, dyed with natural vegetable dyes: the composition combines geometric elements in the Crystal style with the classic storm pattern motif. It is interesting for what it represents: the centre of the rug represents the centre of the universe or the home of the weaver; the broken lines that extend from it towards the four corners connect the centre to the four vertices/cardinal points (sacred mountains) of Navajo territory. The centre is

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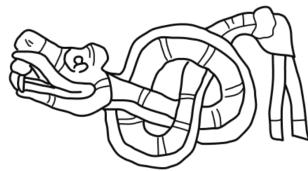
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flanked by elements representing aquatic insects and beetles; the zigzag border of the composition symbolises rain.

A second Navajo rug from New Mexico represents a ceremony with five masked yei-bei-chai dancers, impersonating the benevolent and healing spirit yei, protected and surrounded by a rainbow guardian.

As for the “Apache” peoples, the collection includes an interesting example of a “bullroarer” – called “tzi-ditindi” (“wood that sounds”) in the original language. This object, from New Mexico, consists of a painted and carved wooden blade 20 cm long and 5 cm wide, attached to a long cord of animal fibre.

A unique piece in the collection is a pasko’ola mask, attributable to Yaqui groups and coming from the state of Sonora (Mexico), used by dancers during the “deer dance”. It is an example of religious syncretism between Yaqui tradition and the Christian cult introduced by the Jesuits: the name pasko’ola is in fact a transliteration of the Spanish term pascua. The mask in the collection dates to the 1950s–1960s.

With regard to the Plateau area, there is a Nimíipuu (Nez

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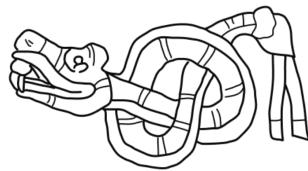
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	<p>Perce) bag from the state of Idaho, dating to the 1950s–1960s. It is made of interlaced maize leaves with a red, eight-pointed star (morning stars) decoration: this bag, intact and in good condition, represents the only example of Nimiípuu artefact in the collection.</p> <p>Finally, as regards the Great Plains, the collection includes various weapons of the Niitsítapi (Blackfoot), among which are a pre-Columbian tomahawk and some arrows and spears dating to the twentieth century.</p>
<i>History of the collection</i>	The collection was acquired by Lorenzo Vescia during his stays in the Americas between 1960 and 1990. On 16 March 1990 it was donated to the museum.
<i>Online Database</i>	
<i>Web page</i>	https://museovescia.org/index.html
<i>Bibliography</i>	

#02

<i>Name of the collection</i>	Fabrizio Colonna collection
<i>Collector</i>	Colonna, Fabrizio
<i>Cultural areas</i>	Great Plains; Southwest

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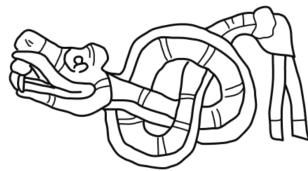
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<i>Ethnic group / community / cultural context</i>	Great Plains: Niitsítapi (Blackfoot); Mandan-Hidatsa (USA) Southwest/Oasisamerica: Diné (Navajo) (USA)
<i>Description of the Collection</i>	<p>The most significant piece in the collection is a Mandan-Hidatsa war jacket, in deerskin painted blue and brown, used – though in excellent condition – and traditionally worn by warriors belonging to elite clans, known precisely for this reason as “jacket wearers”. Particularly noteworthy are the inserts in quillwork (dyed porcupine quills).</p> <p>The collection also includes a breastplate from the northern Great Plains (plains-style breastplate) made of bone hairpipe beads, feathers and abalone shells. Completing the breastplate is a choker made of the same materials.</p> <p>There is also a representative contemporary powwow headdress (1980s), very well preserved, made of crow feathers, beads and strips of ermine fur.</p>
<i>History of the collection</i>	The collection was assembled by Fabrizio Colonna during his travels in the 1980s and 1990s. It was donated to the museum in April 2019.
<i>Online Database</i>	

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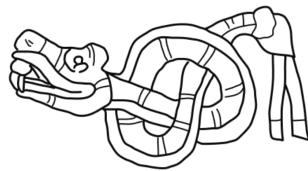
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