

PRESENTATION DETAILS

PRESENTATION TITLE	PENACHO: POMP & PASSION The Mexican feather head-dress in Vienna
VENUE	Museum of Ethnology, Vienna, Neue Burg
DURATION	From November 15, 2012
PRESS CONFERENCE	November 14 at 10 a.m., Column Hall, MVK
OPENING	November 14 at 7 p.m., Column Hall, MVK
NUMBER OF EXHIBITS	10
CURATOR	Gerard van Bussel
EXHIBITION DESIGN	Architekt Krischanitz ZT GmbH
SPACE	250m ²
PUBLICATION	Sabine Haag, Alfonso de Maria y Campos, Lilia Rivero Weber und Christian Feest (Hgg.), Der altemexikanische Federkopfschmuck. 2012. Verlag ZKF Publishers. 152 pages, € 19,90 (German and Spanish)
EDUCATION PROGRAMME	Christine Kaufmann, Tel. +43 (0)664 605 14 - 5050 christine.kaufmann@ethno-museum.ac.at

PENACHO: POMP & PASSION

The Mexican feather head-dress in Vienna

Museum of Ethnology, Vienna

From November 15, 2012

Ancient Splendour Revitalized

The early Mexican feather head-dress is one of the most fragile objects in the Museum of Ethnology, posing myriad problems for conservators. 2010-2012 an Austrian-Mexican commission of experts studied and analyzed its historical importance and present condition as part of a project organized by the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (INAH) in Mexico and the Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien.

The results of this internationally noted and innovative bilateral research and conservation project will be presented in a comprehensive publication.

The project focused on anthropological, historical, iconographic and conservation questions. Materials, technique and older restorations of the feather head-dress were analyzed.

Its present flat appearance dates back to the restoration carried out in 1878 that had erroneously identified the feather head-dress as a standard. This resulted in the object's loss of the three-dimensional shape it had had as a head-dress. At the time over 370 new small metal plates, feathers and skins of kingfishers were incorporated.

The feather head-dress comprises a wealth of different materials: organic ones such as feathers, plant fibres, wood, leather, paper and textiles, but also non-organic materials such as gold and gilded brass. The friction and abrasions caused by these materials and the artifact's age have compromised its state of preservation and complicated its conservation.

The aging process of the organic materials has resulted in irreparable, brittle and fragile areas. Although the object has been stabilized with careful interventions and preventive conservation measures its original condition cannot be recreated. However, after careful cleaning and various conservation measures the feather head-dress can now be put on public display again after an absence of many years.

Between Myth and Truth

Did this feather head-dress really belong to the legendary Aztec Emperor Moctezuma II? How, why and with whom did the "Penacho" come to Europe? Today, many myths and legends are still linked to this magnificent artifact.

In 1519, when Spanish ships reached the shores of what is now Mexico, they encountered the thriving Aztec Empire. Initial contacts were friendly, but soon Hernán Cortéz and his conquistadores vanquished the empire and took Emperor Moctezuma II prisoner. Countless artifacts were sent to Europe. The most magnificent is the early Mexican feather head-dress known in Mexico as “Penacho”.

Called “ain mörischer Huet” (a Moorish hat), it was first mentioned in the inventory of the Armoury of Ferdinand II of Tyrol compiled in 1596 after the Archduke’s death (Ambras Castle).

During the Napoleonic Wars parts of the collection at Ambras were removed to Vienna, where they were displayed at Lower Belvedere Palace. This is where Ferdinand von Hochstetter discovered the feather head-dress and recognized its importance. He had the precious object restored before showcasing it at the k.k. Naturhistorisches Hofmuseum (Imperial Museum of Natural History). Together with the museum’s other ethnographic holdings the feather headdress was eventually deposited in the Museum of Ethnology, opened in 1928.

First identified as a „mörischer Huet“ (a Moorish hat) in the late 16th century, the feather headdress was listed as an „indianischer Huet“ (Indian hat) in later inventories; in 1788 it is called an “indianische Schürze” (Indian apron). This erroneous identification probably resulted from the loss of the original golden beak. This made it difficult to determine the object’s original function and how it was worn. In 1855 the green feathers were identified as those of the Quetzal, which, in turn, pointed to Mexico as the artifact’s country of origin. At the same time its original interpretation as a head-dress was once again accepted. Later, however, Ferdinand von Hochstetter suggested that it could have served as a standard from the time of Moctezuma. In the course of the Congress of Americanists held in 1908 in Vienna, an international commission ultimately accepted its identification as a feather head-dress, which has remained scientific consensus until today.

The early 20th century witnessed the first attempts to link the feather head-dress with Moctezuma himself. This sounded spectacular and enhanced the sensational fame of the artifact. The term “featherwork crown of Moctezuma” was first used in this context; it ignored the fact that rulers of the Aztec Empire were crowned with the Xiuhuitzolli, a tiara set with turquoises.

Today, the “Penacho” is world-famous - celebrated not only as the last of its kind but also for the unrivalled iridescent splendor of hundreds of Quetzal feathers and its sumptuous gold appliqués.

In the Penacho's Shadow

A number of other 16th century featherwork artifacts have survived. Featherwork objects played a seminal role for the Aztecs, the Mayas, the Purépecha and their neighbours. They were used to denote the rank and status of princes, dignitaries, priests and successful warriors. The exhibition includes a number of examples in excellent condition.

PRESS PHOTOGRAPHS

Feather head-dress

Mexico, Aztec, early 16th century
Quetzal, Cotinga, roseate spoonbill, Piaya
feathers; wood, fibres, Amate paper, cotton,
gold, gilded brass
© KHM mit MVK und ÖTM



Fan or standard

Central Mexico, 1st half of the 16th century, Blue-
and-Yellow-Macaw and Scarlet Macaw
feathers, Amate paper, reeds
© KHM mit MVK und ÖTM



Quetzalcoatl

Mexico, Aztec, 15th or early 16th century
Volcanic stone
© KHM mit MVK und ÖTM



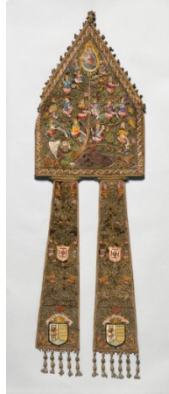
Shield

Central Mexico, early 16th century
Roseate spoonbill, Cotinga, Quetzal, Yellow
Oriole, Great-Tailed Grackle (?) feathers; gold,
reed weaving, leather, cotton, hare skin
© KHM mit MVK und ÖTM



Bishop's Mitre

Mexico, Spain, Purépecha? c. 1550
Hummingbird, Scarlet Macaw, Military Macaw,
flamingo, roseate spoonbill, Red-crowned
Amazon (?) Montezuma oropendola (?),
Great-Tailed Grackle (?) feathers, paper, satin,
gold braid
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The Virgin and Child

Mexico, Purépecha?, 2nd half of the 16th century
Hummingbird, Scarlet Macaw, Military Macaw,
flamingo, Great Egret (?), roseate spoonbill (?),
Montezuma oropendola (?), Great-Tailed
Grackle (?) feathers, paper, wood, gilded
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The Resplendent Quetzal (*Pharomachrus mocinno*)



OPENING HOURS

Museum of Ethnology
1010 Vienna, Heldenplatz

Daily except Tuesdays
von 10 bis 18 Uhr

Library

Mon and Tue 10 am - 4 pm
Wed 10 am - 6 pm
Thurs 10 am - 4 pm
Closed on Fridays

ENTRANCE FEES

Valid until end of 2012

admission	€ 8,-
concessions	€ 6,-
Vienna Ticket	€ 7,-
Groups of 10 or over	€ 6,-
Guided tour	€ 2,-
Children under 19	free
Annual Ticket	€ 29,-

GUIDED TOURS

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