

What is a Huaco? Native Peruvian Cultural Heritage and the Intersection with Art Pedagogy

Author: Amanda S. Alexander University of Texas at Arlington

Abstract

This photo essay highlights: what is a huaco?

The essay examines past, pre-Columbian civilizations of Perú to explore why huacos were important and for what purposes they were used. After glimpsing the past, the essay then looks to current artists who continue to make huacos and what their practices encompass. Connections from past huaco making to current huaco making by living artists in Perú

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then become a rich source of information for art pedagogy and teaching practices. One artist, Lorenzo Cabrera Abanto, is featured as a key, living huaco maker who works to preserve and keep the tradition alive. The author makes an argument about why huacos can be an important study for teachers and classrooms of today and provides videos and resources for those who want to learn more.

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What is a Huaco?

Huacos are a type of pre-Columbian pottery found throughout the Andes, jungles, and coasts of Perú. They are primarily recovered from tombs, sanctuaries, temples, ruins, or the countryside (“Huaco,” 2014). In academic literature, they are mostly referred to as stirrup, spout, or portrait jars or vessels (Bernier, 2009; Brantegem, 2012; Butters, et. al, 2008; Sillar, 1996; Turner, 2013). Pre-Columbian Andean civilizations once used huacos for both utilitarian and decorative purposes including ceremonial, religious, artistic, and aesthetic reasons. Various pre-Columbian civilizations created and historically passed down their unique techniques in ceramics such as the Chávin, Vicús, Paracas, Cajamarca, Nazca, Moche, Recuay, Huari (Wari), Chancay,

and Chimú. The Incan civilization, which assimilated and absorbed all the cultures during its 90 years of expansion, also created huacos. A few examples of huaco images can be seen in the following sections.

Chávin, Moche, and Recuay Cultures: Three Examples

The Chávin culture (900 BC - 200 BC) spanned and influenced much of Perú from the highlands to the coast. Their best known site and major religious and political center was Chávin de Huantar located in the Andes of present day Ancash

(Burger, 2008).

The name Chávin comes from this site, as we do not know the name they gave themselves (Burger, 2008). The Chávin culture represents the first widespread, recognizable artistic style in the Andes. Their art



forms used a technique called contour rivalry, which was a method to create multiple possible visual interpretations of an image (Burger, 1992).

Image 1. Chávin Culture.



Images 2-3 Chávin Culture

An image may be viewed as depicting one thing, and when flipped or turned, the same lines or design depict something entirely new. It is similar to an optical illusion and was purposeful on the part of the Chávin. The designs were only to be read and understood by the high priest of the Chávin cult (Burger, 1992). These types of designs are seen on rock sculptures and their huacos.

Two examples are provided here in images one and two. In the first image, one can see relief designs in black. When the huaco is turned, the design changes, but one can continue to view a type of face slightly different depending on the angle. In the se-

cond image, the face remains stationary, however, other parts of the design can be interpreted in different ways depending on the viewpoint.

The Moche (100 AD – 800 AD), or sometimes referred to as Mochica, thrived along the northern coast of Perú near present day Trujillo (Castillo-Butters & Castillo, 2008). They were agriculturally based with a significant level of engineering skills to construct irrigation canals to water their crops, and with their sophistication and innovation, they also built large temples called huacas (Bernier, 2009). A huaca is not the same as a huaco—notice the change from an “a” to an “o.” In Perú and in academic literature, it is important to note the difference. Both are Quechua,



Image 3. Huacos on the right side are Moche Culture (huacos on the left are Vicus).



which was a significant feature in rituals and their cosmological beliefs.

The Recuay culture (200 BC – 600 AD) was related to the Moche of the north coast; however, lived in the Ancash region near where the Chávin were located (Lau, 2011). They were influenced by both cultures as seen in their architecture, stonework, sculpture, and huacos. They produced distinctive huacos and stone sculptures decorated with images of rulers and supernatural creatures related to Recuay cosmology (see image

Image 4. Moche Culture.



a pre-Incan language; however, huaca means ‘sacred place.’ We know much about the Moche culture through studying their huacos as well as their huacos. The huacos of the Moche are known for their great detail depicting and expressing their every day lives including hunting, fishing, fighting, sacrifice, sexual encounters, and elaborate ceremonies (Bray, 2000). They used mostly colors of red and white while black was rare.

In images three and four, one can view warriors and priests (or perhaps shamans). The depictions of everyday life of the Moche culture include clothing, accessories, headdresses, armor, and mythological beliefs. For example, in image three, right hand side, the priest has serpents as hair or part of the headdress,

5) (Lau, 2011). One of the best known creatures is the moon animal or moon monster, a fox-like or feline animal with a

long, toothy snout and head crest (“Heilbrunn Timeline,” 2006). Huacos of the Recuay are often made of white kaolin-like clay and decorated by resist or negative patterns using colors such as white, black, and red (Lau, 2011).

The moon monster on the huaco in image five is seen on the bottom portion of the piece in the black and white design. It is somewhat difficult to make out from this image; however, if one looks closely, they can see a head with eyes and teeth. On the top portion of the huaco, there seems to be a priest with people as well as a rodent probably a mouse.

Image 5. Recuay Culture.

Native Peruvian Cultural Heritage: Past and Present

Since the Spanish conquest of Perú, huaco making has continued generationally as a tradition by many Native artists—although the Spanish conquistadors considered it inferior and worked to suppress and destroy huacos and the tradition (Steele, 2004). Artists have not and do not traditionally develop new huaco forms and designs, but instead they recreate pieces from the past. This tradition has

continued for centuries indirectly becoming a form of preservation, and more recently a source of income. However, with globalization and advancements in technology, the making of huacos is decreasing as Peruvians now tend to look for employment in (perceived) higher-class careers. It is difficult to know how many huaco makers remain in Perú.

My searches in both English and Spanish reveal little regarding who is producing huacos and in what regions people are producing them. Walter Jose Acosta from Lima sells his huacos on the website Novica, which is unique because no other large retailers are found. Along with Walter, there is Lorenzo Cabrera Abanto who works out of Cajamarca, Perú making huacos. He has continued the tradition for almost fifty years and plans for the work to be passed on through his assistant. One can find a video of his work at:



https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmYNs6yg_X4. Lorenzo created the huacos featured in every image in this article.

Lorenzo Cabrera Abanto: A Life-Long Huaco Maker



Although cultures, identities, and art forms change through history in a fluid, continuous motion, Lorenzo has made a career and lifeway of keeping the tradition of huaco making alive and accurate to past civilizations. He has lived and worked his entire life in Cajamarca, Perú and studied huacos in the same location. He has created over 300 huacos from various pre-Columbian civilizations adding up to his development of over 1,500 huaco molds. Image six is a photo of Lorenzo's extensive collection of both original huacos as well as his reproductions for sale. Images seven and eight are close up of various huacos, however not comprehensive, that Lorenzo has (re)created from past civilizations such as those discussed at the onset of this article.

Image 6. Lorenzo's workshop and extensive collection of (re)created huacos.

Images 7 & 8. Close up of Lorenzo's artwork.

Image 9. Lorenzo creating a huaco from the Nazca culture.

He has learned through the years how to (re)create a huaco as accurately and precisely to the pre-Columbian civilizations as possible. He has found the most plastic clays, (re)created tools and materials, and studied the pre-Columbian's mold making techniques so intensely that when he sells a huaco it has to be specifically marked for customs officials, and the customer is given a detailed receipt. His technique is so accurate that shippers and buyers cannot tell his pieces from the originals. Lorenzo truly is a master of his trade, and he is a living repository of ancient knowledge, heritage, and art making in Perú and beyond. Image nine is Lorenzo in his workshop making a huaco from the Nazca culture.

Intersection with Pedagogy

As art educators, it is important to teach about various global art forms and cultures as well as listen to and learn from people around the planet. Lorenzo's connections, processes, techniques, and ability to learn deeply about all the pre-Columbian cultures of Perú make him a perfect study for art educators to include in their art content and lessons. The teaching of huacos and/or Lorenzo's artwork could insight fruitful discussion in the art classroom around pottery, ceramic techniques, visual and material culture, how art forms and cultures have changed

or stayed the same, Native heritage preservation, and historical content that revolves around archaeology and anthropology.

As global citizens recognizing the quickening speed of disappearing cultures and art forms, this type of subject matter might also provide students with a better understanding of shifting global paradigms, colonization, authority, and capitalism. This can contribute to students' sensitivity to diverse life styles, values, and beliefs and connect them to (inter)national, local, and individual identities (Garber, 2010).



Exploring old forms of art making—or perhaps rarely discussed forms of art making—and alternative visions of social structures and conditions is meaningful. It is vital to recognize

Native knowledge that may be forgotten and open discussions on how this knowledge maintains a sense of place, identity, and community. Teachers and students can practice and experience a different pedagogy by thinking about and incorporating various peoples' knowledge into curriculum. Resources and museum sites of interest to learn more about huacos and Lorenzo's work are:

☒ Museo Larco – This is one of Lima, Perú's premier collections of huacos. <http://www.museolarco.org>

☒ Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú – This museum houses an impressive collection of pre-Columbian artifacts and art. <http://mnaahp.cultura.pe>

☒ Art Project by Google – A large, online database of artworks from around the world including many images of huacos and pre-Columbian, Peruvian art. <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/project/art-project?hl=en>

☒ Cleveland Museum of Art – Its collection of pre-Columbian art includes more than 750 works. <http://www.clevelandart.org>

☒ The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston – The museum collection spans 5,000 years. <http://www.mfah.org>

☒ Los Angeles County Museum of Art – One of the best art collections in the U.S. <http://www.lacma.org>

☒ Lorenzo's Facebook page – If one is interested, they can follow Lorenzo on Facebook.

<https://www.facebook.com/leachecea>

Huacos and Lorenzo as a resource could be used as art education material for classrooms, community spaces, museums, and transdisciplinary connections. It is important that as art educators we provide young people with knowledge of past traditions and art forms, connect the past with ongoing, living traditions, and better understand those who are preserving their own cultural heritage around the planet.

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmYNs6yg_X4.



Lorenzo creating the huacos featured in every image in this article.