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the arts

UTAC exhibit needs no silver lining

JAN 19, 2013 | BY SINEAD DOHERTY-GRANT



On Tuesday, January 15, the University of Toronto Art Center opened its doors to Luminescence: The Silver of Peru, an exhibit showcasing Peruvian works of art ranging from the beginning of the common era to the present. The four rooms in University College are filled with the iridescent shine of gilded silver, illuminating the colourful cultural history on display for all ages.

The silver pieces that predate the Spanish colonization were used as offerings to a favourite god, in ceremonial dances, and as symbols of wealth and status by the Inca, Chimú, and Nazca civilizations. The silver is eerily lovely in its immaculate perfection of tiny swirls and intricate patterns; all of these are preserved without injury or dullness.

By the 17th century the Christian influence visibly permeates the art, showcased in an oil painting of the Virgin Mary. This is lavishly engulfed in a thick, symmetrical frame of characteristic gilded silver. However, the Christian grandeur is eclipsed by the eighteenth and nineteenth century crowns also on display; these are embellished with colourful rhinestones in a show of stunning historical regalia, arguably the grandest artifacts in all four rooms.

For those interested in learning more about the cultural and political contexts, there are helpful descriptions throughout the gallery facilitating a deeper understanding of the pieces. Burial rituals, Inca Gods, and the decline of silver during the Pacific War are discussed in depth in the collection of over two thousand years of craft.

The collection of artifacts celebrates various historical stylistic preferences and a proud legacy of objects. It successfully showcases the precise, intricate artistry of Indigenous groups that continues to inspire awe. The ancient pieces are distanced from us by time and mystery but the beauty can be appreciated by all.

University of Toronto Art Center is located at University College, 15 King's College Circle. Luminescence: The Silver of Peru, runs until March 9.

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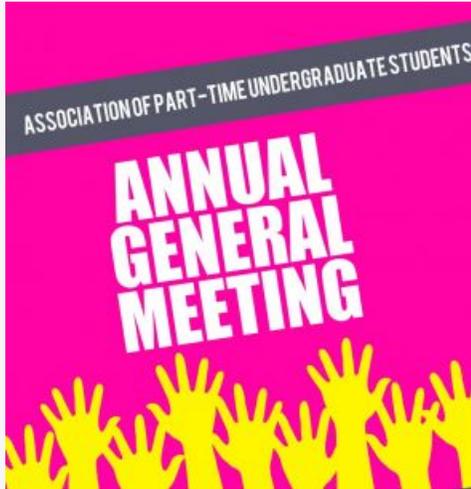
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