

BEST RESTAURANTS
AND BAR GUIDES



NOW READERS' CHOICE 2017!
VOTING IS OPEN!



THIS WEEK IN PRINT



NEWS ▾ LIFESTYLE ▾ FOOD & DRINK ▾ MUSIC ▾ MOVIES ▾ STAGE ▾ ART & BOOKS ▾ EVENTS ▾ CLASSIFIEDS

HOME / ART & BOOKS / ART /

Silver speaks

Fine show evokes issues of power

BY **FRAN SCHECHTER**

JANUARY 24, 2013 12:00 AM

Like 0    



A 19th-century pomander shaped like an armadillo is part of *Luminescence: The Silver of Peru* at the U of T Art Centre.

LUMINESCENCE: THE SILVER OF PERU at University of Toronto Art Centre (15 King's College Circle), to March 9. 416-978-1838. [See listings](#). Rating: **NNNN**

Curator Anthony Shelton of UBC's Museum of Anthropology traces Andean history through beautiful silver artifacts that date from the first millennium to the present.

Though the objects are dazzling, issues of power and economics surrounding precious metals inevitably come up in Shelton's informative text. (Our strange relationship to these shiny substances is ongoing: the show is sponsored by a Canadian mining company operating in South America, Pan American Silver Corp.)

The sophisticated works crafted by Incan and other native smiths are rare survivors: the conquistadors, whose writings described solid silver and gold life-sized Incan sculptures and architectural elements, melted and shipped home everything they could get their hands on.

To the Inca, silver and gold held spiritual rather than monetary value, connecting rulers to the gods. Silver (symbolizing the moon and the feminine) and gold (the sun, masculine) were held in equal regard, and gold objects, like a bird-shaped tweezers in the show, were sometimes plated with silver.

Royal and ritual items, including tunics made of multiple small silver squares, beakers whose stems are rattles and nose ornaments, are decorated with Andean designs - geometric symbols and representations of people, birds, fish and other animals - that seem at once strikingly modern and alien.

The galleries of post-conquest silver include paintings illustrating how indigenous traditions merged with Catholicism: angels took on Andean bird symbolism; the Devil was conflated with underworld god Supay. But text also touches on the toll Spanish mining practices took on the native population.

Church accoutrements, personal shrines, crowns for holy statues, pomanders and a spectacular solid silver banner are animated by lively floral and animal decoration. The final room showcases sculptural silver by contemporary Peruvians in a mix of folkloric and modern styles.

Whether Peru's rich veins of precious metals have proved a blessing or a curse, its metalsmiths have crafted unique works that transcend any preconceptions of silver as a stodgy area of the decorative arts mainly of interest to specialists.

art@nowtoronto.com

Tags **art**, **art review**, **Critics' Picks**

 Like 0    

RELATED