



POINTS WEST

Formative Stone Sculpture from Mesoamerica

May 21st - July 11th, 2026

Opening Reception: Thursday, May 21st, 2026: 6-8pm



When Miguel Covarrubias first dramatically proclaimed Olmec as the *mother culture of Mesoamerica*, it came with a catch. He also identified at the same time a Mezcala style and proposed a highlands location for the origins of Olmec art that focused on Guerrero as a potential source. This made perfect sense: Olmec representation had to come from somewhere and the more primitive, abstract Mezcala tradition seemed a logical fit. Today, the Olmec are labelled a *pristine* or *originary culture*—among only a handful historically that arise *de novo*, without any apparent precedent. A select group, to be sure, that includes the Moche in this hemisphere and Chinese Neolithic Hongshan culture in the east.

Seen in this light, Mezcala and related artistic traditions like Chontal and Sultepec are not so much the forerunners of Olmec art as they are its aftermath; ie, as Olmec culture began to wane in the Middle to Late Formative period, a local style emerged in Guerrero—more akin to other parts of West Mexico—and mostly in stone as opposed to clay. While style can be misleading, there is evidence in the types of figures that appear in Mezcala art to support this direction in evolution. Examples in the show range from broad typologies like the use of the celt form as a basis for figuration, to more specific representations that are on view. These include well known “stargazers”, acrobats, bench figures, flying figures, and even animals such as the jaguar—all associated with Olmec rulership, religion, and maize agriculture but not generally found in the art from other parts of West Mexico. Indeed, the temple models in the exhibition, which are largely unique to Mezcala art, argue for a later cultural horizon.

Beginning with the Olmec, so much happens in Mesoamerica that is central to the hemisphere—a kind of cultural beehive lasting over 2500 years. Drawing on material collected over nearly half a century from established collections in New York, California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, this exhibition casts the development of stone sculpture of the Formative Period in a new light. Besides well-known types such as the stargazer, the exhibition includes standing and seated figures dating from 1200 BCE to 400 CE that represent some of the most sophisticated abstractions in stone of the human figure in the Americas. With an exhibition catalogue and essay by GA Wardle.

Images:

Top Right: Mezcala, Seated Jaguar, 500 BCE-100 CE, Black Serpentine, 8.875 x 5 x 5.75 in.

Top Left Olmec, Seated Jaguar, 900-600 BCE, Blue Jadeite, 9.375 x 5.25 x 4.25 in.

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