

Kukuli Velarde: A Closer Look

Learn about the complex history behind *La Linda Nasca* by artist Kukuli Velarde. Engage in slow looking, learn about Velarde and her work, and get new ideas for your own art making. Students can view the work in the museum, online, or on a classroom poster.

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Kukuli Velarde (Peruvian-American, born 1962)
La Linda Nasca, 2011
Low-fire clay, underglazes, glazes, metal, gold leaf, luster, and glass
Arts of the Americas Discretionary Fund
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QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING

- Look closely at the work of art. What grabs your attention? List things you notice in the top, middle, and bottom of the piece.
- What else do you see?
- Imagine you were to touch the artwork. What textures would you feel? What do you think it is made of?
- Are there any clues that help you know when this piece might have been made? Do you think it looks old or new?
- Look at the expression on the figure's face. What do you think the woman is feeling?
- Do you think this object might have a function? If so, what purpose might it serve?
- What do you wonder about this artwork?
- Read the information on the back of this resource to learn about the artist and this work. Look at the work again once you're done. How have your observations and thoughts about it changed?

CREATIVE RESPONSES

- Think about someone who is important to you. Make a list of words that describe some of their qualities and interests. How might you show those things in a picture? Create a portrait of that person and include objects, patterns, or details that communicate something about their life.
- Kukuli Velarde is interested in the complex nature of identity. Think about the communities, qualities, and interests that make you who you are. Write down at least 5 words. Use magazine clippings and other found materials to make a collage that expresses different aspects of your identity and culture.

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Photo courtesy of Kukuli Velarde

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Peruvian-American artist Kukuli Velarde (b. 1962, Cusco, Peru) creates artworks that celebrate Indigenous cultures and explore the effects of Spanish colonization on the Andes. In this clay sculpture, she transforms a famous statue in Cusco's cathedral of the Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, called La Linda, into an ancient Nasca goddess. In this way, Velarde imagines how modern Andeans might embrace both their Spanish and Indigenous heritages.

The land now known as Peru has a long and dynamic history from far before the Spanish invasion. Indigenous communities have lived in this region for thousands of years. People like the Nasca developed their own distinct cultural practices, religious beliefs, and artist traditions. In 1532, Spanish soldiers, called conquistadors, invaded these lands and eventually took over the immense Inca Empire (who built Machu Picchu).

Colonization is the process of one group conquering another through physical violence and political, economic, and cultural control. Spaniards colonized Peru because of the tremendous wealth of gold and silver that these Indigenous communities possessed. They also destroyed their deities and sacred sites, often called huacas, in order to convert them to Christianity. The introduction of the annual Christian festival Corpus Christi, which includes a public procession of Catholic saints and the Virgin Mary, was part of the Spanish colonizers' efforts to replace Indigenous traditions with their own.

Indigenous Peruvians found ways to keep their traditions alive. Under Spanish colonial rule, many Andeans began to believe that Indigenous deities were the true identities of Christian figures; for example, believing Saint James was an Inca god of lightning, Illapa. Andean artists began including elements of both Indigenous and Christian deities in their work, and the symbols and traditions began to merge. Corpus Christi continues to be celebrated in Peru every June as a parade with large floats of saintly figures that incorporate local and Indigenous elements. Velarde sees this blending of cultures, or syncretism, as a strategy of cultural survival for Indigenous people.

Syncretism inspires many of Velarde's works including *La Linda Nasca*. The shape of this vessel is inspired by Nasca ceramics and the decorative elements include an array of Nasca imagery, such as stylized hummingbirds and faces. But we also see the halo and crescent moon that is sometimes associated with the Virgin Mary. The wide smile of this contemporary figure suggests the beauty that lies within the complex blending of cultures and traditions in each person. Velarde says the smile shows that *La Linda Nasca* is "happy to be alive."

EXPLORE MORE ARTWORKS

La Linda Nasca is on display at the Art Institute of Chicago in a gallery of Nasca ceramics and provides an opportunity for viewers to draw connections between this contemporary work and Indigenous Andean art traditions. Explore all the Nasca artworks in the museum's collection [here](#), or look closely at the following works: [Vessel with Women's Faces and Masked Beings](#), [Vessel of a Woman](#), [Panel Fragment](#).

View a work by another Peruvian artist who explores the complicated past of Spanish colonialism: [Neo-Huaco #3 from the series ¿Y qué hacemos con nuestra historia? \(So What Do We Do with Our History?\)](#).

Learn about more artists from Latin America in this museum highlight: [Artists from Latin America](#)