

Curating ancient Peru:
Engaging with the past through museum exhibitions

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Abstract

This PhD explores the nature, process and impact of six museum exhibitions and their relevant edited volumes. I analyse how material culture from ancient Peru was collected, studied and displayed in the context of the exhibitions and consider the realities of the country where they were carried out. My principal argument is that they pioneered new, engaging experiences with the past. This was achieved by developing unique narratives in innovative displays, bringing together updated scientific research and multidisciplinary collaborations from renowned scholars.

I developed these projects over ten years as curator at the Art Museum of Lima (hereafter, MALI), one of Peru's leading arts and cultural institutions. Despite its vast cultural heritage, Peru has been marked by a significant breach between archaeology and education, limited resources for disseminating culture, a minimal history of exhibitions dedicated to the critical interpretation and display of this past, and a general lack of professionalisation in museology. These factors have led to distant and sometimes outdated access to the past.

This PhD submission consists of a dossier of six edited exhibition catalogues, my articles within those publications, visual material, and a critical analysis of the exhibitions and the published work. The study begins with an introduction to the relationship between the past and the public, including examples of past initiatives and different forms of curation. It then details the Peruvian context, where I developed these projects. I present each case study from the curatorial background to the concept, narrative, and display, highlighting how pre-Columbian collections were formed and arrived in museums, how they are described and how the stories we can create with them might be enriched through different approaches in interpretation and display. The essay details the outcomes of the projects, revealing how they have innovated and widened engagements to experience the past, and finally sets the ground on how these practices can be more inclusive in the future.

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Personal research background

After receiving degrees in Archaeology (Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú) and Museum Studies (University College, London), I began developing curatorial projects and exhibitions, with accompanying publications and public programmes to reach diverse audiences. These projects were carried out over more than ten years and have been presented in Perú and museums and cultural institutions in countries such as Germany, Switzerland, Spain, North America and the United Kingdom.

I carried out these projects when I was Curator of pre-Columbian collections and Chief Curator at MALI (2006-2019), where we undertook essential collaborations with local and international institutions. Among other tasks, I organised, curated and published more than fifteen exhibitions. In Peru, these shows were milestones because they presented different stories of the Andean past in didactic and innovative ways but without losing the depth and rigour of academic research. After MALI, I joined the British Museum as a curator in the department of Africa, Oceania and the Americas as lead curator for the exhibition *Peru: A Journey in Time* (2020-present), which has been vital in finding alternative ways to show narratives based on pre-Columbian material to British audiences.

Critical Analysis

I. Introduction

1.1 Purpose and structure

The exhibitions I present in this study were carried out in the Art Museum in Lima,¹ in Peru, a country with a vast cultural heritage, home to some of the most fascinating cultures of the pre-Columbian past. (Appendix A, Basis of Submission) Despite its cultural richness, Peru is marked by a significant breach between archaeology and education, a minimal history of exhibitions dedicated to the critical interpretation and display of this past, and the general lack of professionalisation in museology. The present analysis explores the nature, relevance and impact of these curatorial projects. It reflects on how they have been pioneering in providing engaging experiences to the past by proposing new narratives, bringing updated scientific research,² fostering multidisciplinary collaborations, and presenting innovative displays.

The analysis begins with an overview of the discussions involving the relationships between archaeology and the wider public, the place of archaeological objects in museums, and the curator's role in producing new meanings. It continues with a description of the museum scene and current practices in Peru, focusing on how formal and non-formal learning spaces³ have approached archaeology and past display initiatives. Following this, I detail my six

¹ Based in Lima, Peru, the MALI is a self-funded museum governed by a Board of Trustees. It is housed in the Exhibition Palace, a heritage building owned by the Municipality of Lima. MALI holds the most comprehensive art collection in the region, from the pre-Columbian period to the present. Since its foundation in 1961, the museum's collection has been enriched through significant acquisitions and donations. In recent decades, the museum has focused its efforts on opening new perspectives on the rich, complex and understudied history of Peruvian art through the development of research projects, exhibitions and publications (MALI Visitor's guide, 2015).

² Written confirmation by co-authors and scientific contributors included in Appendix I.

³ Non-formal education refers to any educational activity carried out outside the framework of the formal education system, like schools or universities. See, for example, Johnson and Majewska, 2022.

exhibitions, highlighting aspects of the background, scope and narrative, presented chronologically, showing the evolution and contributions of my curatorial work. The discussion also reflects on two critical dimensions that define the collections' presentation, described below.

Object journeys. The processes by which collections were formed and arrived in museums can differ in nature and purpose. Most collections in Peru were formed due to private initiatives, which became integrated into public museums over time. So, the criteria were initially based on personal decisions and the antiquities market. Moreover, the “social life” of pre-Columbian objects, how they are valued, the lives they acquire once they are excavated or discovered, and their journey before they arrive in museums, can influence how material culture is perceived and displayed.⁴ In this context, I aim to discuss briefly how the birth of museums and the Peruvian archaeology scene⁵ has played a part in this process, as they relate to the collections I worked with.

Classification of objects. The debate on whether archaeological material should be treated as artefacts, part of a broader historical context or as works of art and where the individual object is prioritised, is of particular interest to me (and more widely),⁶ as my projects have dealt with archaeological collections within an art history museum. This critical analysis reflects on the way pre-Columbian collections have been labelled and described, responding to their form, technique and decoration, which usually come from the chronologies and stylistic sequences proposed by archaeologists, and because of their positivistic basis, are often seen as rigid and immutable. My six interventions have sought to challenge these boundaries, giving space to new terms and associations, and result from the study of objects' biographies and updated research.

⁴ Hill Boone, 1993: 2; Alberti, 2005: 560.

⁵ Tello and Mejia Xesspe, 1967.

⁶ Clifford, 1988: 189.

With this analysis, I intend to demonstrate how my exhibitions have been unprecedented in Peru in the ways described above. In addition, I will also detail how they have contributed to a discourse that leaves behind the classic stories dedicated to the dominant groups,⁷ rejects the old-fashioned way of presenting Andean cultures as a chronological sequence of ceramic styles⁸ and which treats objects as devoid of context and merely passive symbols of a remote past.

1.2 The Past for the wider public

Archaeology and its responsibility to the broader public have been extensively explored in recent decades.⁹ The main channels on how this discipline can reach general audiences, according to Peter Stone, include academia (theoretical archaeology), indigenous views of the past, structured formal education (primary and secondary schools) and finally, museums (space of non-formal learning and interpretation), the focus of the present analysis. Of these four, the museum is the primary institutional liaison that connects archaeology with non-specialist audiences.¹⁰

1.2.1 Approaching the past through material culture

Museums that house archaeological material, whether anthropology or art museums, deal with objects that have been extracted and removed from their original context. At one point, they were left by their maker or user in a particular place—a tomb, building or a random site, then remained frozen in time for years, centuries, millennia until they were discovered. When revealed, they can follow different paths, and some end up in museums. The site where it

⁷ Molyneux, 1994: 3.

⁸ Relative chronologies based on stylistic changes in ceramics across time and space have been particularly influential (esp. Rowe 1967).

⁹ Scarre and Coningham, 2013; Shanks and Tilley, 1992.

¹⁰ Golding and Modest, 2013; Stone, 1994:17; Barker, 2010: 294; Shanks and Tilley, 1992: 68. For the educational role of museums, see Hooper Greenhill (1994, 1995, 2007).

belonged is no longer there, and much context is lost in the transition between their discovery and its exhibition presentation,¹¹ so the task often is to create a story with it, an account that brings that distant past to an experience in the present. Through the lens of the museum curator or specialist, the interaction with the object is produced in a process circumscribed in the present, a commodified time,¹² where this material culture will never be studied again from its moment of creation. Therefore, those who study the past are, in the words of George Kubler, “like astronomers who observe the light of long-dead stars”.¹³ In the study of Andean pre-Columbian cultures, we sometimes deal with objects produced up to three thousand years ago.

For this reason, there are different perspectives on how this material can be approached in museums. In Shanks and Tilley’s critique, they argue that museums often “misrepresent the past, distorting it through selection and classification and creating a particular historical narrative”.¹⁴ The process of looking at the past is always done from the present, and therefore is, according to some, a re-creation, a recontextualisation. Hence, from this point of view museum curators can distance people from their past by fostering structured visits displaying pre-interpreted objects, and hence should be read in other ‘legitimate’ forms, like self-interpretation, rather than only focus on scientific processes that create absolute dates and linear chronologies.¹⁵ Some studies, propose that objects, rather than static elements, can be used as social mediators of meanings, as they can be given agency to fulfil different purposes.¹⁶

¹¹ Shanks and Tilley, 1992: 9.

¹² Ibid.:11.

¹³ Kubler in Morphy, 1994: 140.

¹⁴ Shanks and Tilley, *ibid.*: 68.

¹⁵ Ucko, 1994: xi.

¹⁶ Gell, 1998.

Barker's study on Archaeology and Museums provides a detailed account of the educational roles of archaeological museums, with illustrative data on surveys and cases of how information can be transmitted to audiences in exhibitions.¹⁷

1.2.2 Imbuing meanings to objects

Prehistoric objects have intrinsic semantic categories with which archaeologists have the task to unveil through the reconstruction of their biographies.¹⁸ But once objects are discovered and collected, they are invested with new meanings through social interactions, accumulative throughout their lives.¹⁹ New crucial shifts occur when they are acquired by the museum, an event which according some scholars is probably the most significant event in the object's life, one which is particularly enriched through documentation.²⁰ Another critical point in this trajectory has to do with curatorial recommendations, which contribute to adding new layers to these biographies.

For example, when a museum (and its specialists) decide that a particular object should be included in a specific exhibition, it can be selected for the following criteria: its aesthetic attributes, historical relevance or because it fulfils a particular story within the museum space.²¹ Most scholars will grant that the objects cannot act in their own right; instead, they need to be given agency in different interactions that comprise relationships between objects and people.²² This is a subjective process and can be done in many different ways based on the choices of those who decide what stories are worth sharing. For example, one curator can create a totally different exhibition in scope, using precisely the same group of objects. In

¹⁷ Barker, 2010.

¹⁸ Morphy, 1994: 655; Joy, 2009: 543.

¹⁹ Gosden and Marshall, 1999: 170.

²⁰ Alberti, 2005: 565. See also include Gosden and Marshall (1999) and Joy (2009), building on Appadurai (1986) for ancient materials.

²¹ For how art objects can be valued, see Morphy, 1994: 650-653.

²² Alberti, 2005: 561.

recent decades, there has been more critical reflection about how exhibitions, which deal with objects both ethnographic and archaeological, have been conceived and developed.²³

Adding to the complexity, often material was created by societies that operated under structures and worldviews that are difficult to accept by Western methodologies. As Gell argues, objects produced by cultures that anthropologists study cannot be understood by the Western “art world”.²⁴ This is also the case of pre-Columbian societies. They were, for this reason, for a long time named “Primitive” as a way of distancing them from the “civilised”.²⁵ Western appropriation of non-Western Art that considers the object often in isolation, devoid of its original context and the cultural processes in which it was created,²⁶ is, without doubt, one of the greatest challenges of curatorial work.²⁷

1.3 New voices in museums

The New Museology arose in the early 1980s from a consensus that museums required urgent change, as they were decried as elitist and obsolete institutions. This followed a discourse, already begun in the previous decade²⁸ around the social and political roles of the museum, which could no longer be considered a “temple”, a mere custodian of material culture²⁹ or an authoritative institution. To survive, museums had to make profound changes, moving away from classic collections-centred models of curation, guided by Western views, towards a public-oriented and decolonising approach.³⁰ The New Museology resulted in new

²³ See for example, Hooper, 2009.

²⁴ Gell, 1998: 5.

²⁵ Morphy, 1994: 648; Baudez, 2002: 139.

²⁶ Baudez, 2002: 139.

²⁷ Even if it's not the focus of this study, other critical ongoing debates on how to display archaeological material include ethics about collecting and showing cultural property, as well as ownership and how the voices of the past should be represented. For a controversial but indicative position, see Hicks (2020); also Cuno (2008, 2009) and Mauch (1999).

²⁸ Cameron, 1971.

²⁹ Delgado Ceron and Mz-Recaman, 1994: 148.

³⁰ Mayrand, 1985; UNESCO Convention, London 1983, Quebec 1984.

orientations implemented in different stages in museums worldwide, some of which are still being considered and debated.

From these ideas arose the need to diversify the voices of those represented in museums, as a way of engaging with a broader community, which, in accordance to Golding's view "not only promotes understanding of cultural diversity, but also forges a contemporary connection with lived experiences".³¹

More recently, different forms of collaborations and co-curations are finding their way in major museums, not only in exhibitions but also in other aspects of the organization being reconsidered, such as the care and stewardship of collections.³² Here I will outline how museums are recently engaging with source communities, through the incorporation of indigenous voices to curatorial narratives. This is particularly relevant to this study because this was not always possible in my MALI projects due to a series of reasons I will discuss later, but I envision them as possibilities for future practices. Moreover, they are fundamental to my recent and current work, which due to limitations of space were not included in this analysis.³³ In the following lines I present two examples.

The opening of the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian, Washington in 2004 can be seen as a milestone in a long-troubled history of misrepresenting Native American groups in museums. The museum made empowering decisions since its foundation, like the appointment of Dr Richard West as its first director, a member of the Arapaho and Cheyenne Tribes. Curators have also spent months working in the communities, to develop joint narratives, instead of the community representatives coming to the museum, a foreign space. The debates stemming from this approach center on the degree of compatibility between Indigenous perspectives and Western structure of knowledge,³⁴ and that incorporating multiple voices in the museum space can result in misleading narratives.

³¹ Golding, 2013: 14.

³² Ratima Nolan, 2022.

³³ New forms of curation were introduced in my most recent exhibition *Peru. A Journey in Time*, British Museum (Nov 2021-Feb 2022), which I curated alongside Jago Cooper.

³⁴ Golding and Modest, 2013:18.

In a different context, the recent exhibition *The Portable Universe/El Universo en tus manos: Thoughts and Splendor of Indigenous Colombia* presented at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) displayed for the first time its collection of archaeological ceramics and metalwork from Colombia.³⁵ The unprovenanced collection had not been studied previously, and given the scarce archaeological research in the region, it seemed difficult to relate these objects to their places of origin. The exhibition's narratives arose from a collaboration of the curators with the Arahua group of Santa Marta, who they visited over three years of pre-exhibition work. The group did not have a previous relationship with similar objects, or styles, but they claimed them as their own. Open discussions resulted in innovative displays where the objects did not show production dates or classical technical labels, to privilege indigenous voices over scientific knowledge. The exhibition also attempted to break down the stereotypes of Colombia being related only to its gold, and the myth of “El Dorado”.

The above examples might seem similar in concept but are different regarding the voices they represent. Native American groups have been protected in 574 nations that are recognised by the Federal Government of the United States. They have proven direct relationships with the objects and human remains housed in collections, and there is a long history of restitution claims.

For the ancient Americas, the context is different. The establishment of Colonial rule after the European Conquest resulted in the decimation of populations, the destruction of local beliefs, and material culture being plundered or destroyed. Indigenous groups were incorporated into a new regime. The curators of the LACMA exhibition could have worked with the Arahua group or any other, according to the curators; the selection was based on which group was more friendly and open to conversations.

This section detailed two critical concerns about how archaeology can be approached in the museum space. I have highlighted the different views of how this material can be shared with general audiences, whether this is working closely with scientific research, the interest in delivering more informative exhibitions, or offering more inclusive experiences. Following

³⁵ Burtenshaw et al., 2022.

this, I detailed recent museum trends to engage with the wider community by incorporating indigenous voices. I have outlined these tendencies because they help to contextualise the critical discussion of my own exhibitions in Peru, which lacked these forms of museum curation, a subject I will return to later.

II. Placing the research context

In this section, I discuss the place of archaeology in education and in Peru. I describe how archaeology has been approached through formal and non-formal education, including via schools and museums, and to what extent they have or haven't been able to create synergies. I contend that the gaps created by the outdated ways by which archaeology has been taught (in formal spaces), can be filled by access to and experiences in museums, especially in archaeological exhibitions. Additionally I characterise the limited history of archaeological display in Peruvian museums, as a backdrop to contextualise what we achieved through my own projects.

2.1 Archaeology and Education in South America

In her analysis of archaeology and public awareness in Argentina, Irina Podgorny joins other critics in lamenting the educational systems of Latin America as unbalanced and with unresolved problems of the past.³⁶ Despite the different political and historical contexts of each country, similar problems include unequal access to education, centralisation, and scarce resources for the dissemination of culture. The ways in which the past has been approached pedagogically by various Latin American countries also have points in common. In most countries, courses on history begin with the European invasion, and what came before is taught as a remote, idealised past, which for centuries was seen as the history of inferior and uncivilised societies. Some view this as a history of manipulation, where the official history is narrated in a certain way that denigrates the indigenous roots.³⁷ Moreover, updated studies about the past tend to remain in academia, specialised research projects and universities and are seldom accessible in schools and museums.

³⁶ Tedesco, in Podgorny, 1994: 183.

³⁷ Vargas and Sanoja, 1994: 50.

2.2 The Peruvian scene

2.2.1 Archaeology in education

In the Peruvian formal education system, archaeology has always been taught in the last years of primary and first years of secondary school as a general overview of the “ancient cultures” that inhabited the Andes before the arrival of the Spanish. It forms part of the Peruvian History course, and its contents have been based on the classic chronological narrative of the primary and most well-known cultures, labelled and identified through its material culture.

An updated version of the National Curriculum of Basic Education prepared by the Ministry of Education was approved in 2016, based on previous experience and progress made in the development of learning standards by the Ministry of Education, in consultation with teachers and experts, national and international.³⁸ Instead of proper structured topics the curriculum is now structured based on four curricular criteria: competencies, capacities, learning standards and performance. There is no learning document focusing on archaeology or history, but competencies and learning standards that relate to culture, history and heritage are addressed transversally. The Ministry sets up the guidelines and each school applies them with a certain freedom.

Transversal learning, a technique where knowledge can be achieved through different competences, barely contains any content from updated academic and archaeological research. Taught information still draws from outdated manuals that continue to foster archaeological stereotypes, which can lead to misleading understandings. For example, there is still a focus on rote learning, prioritising memorising the big themes, like Chavín, Moche or the Incas, as well as general chronologies, thus giving less importance to regional stories and less known cultures.³⁹ Likewise, important landmarks that have been used to perpetuate a national identity, like the Nasca geoglyphs or Machu Picchu, are normally studied out of

³⁸ Currículo Nacional de Educación Básica, Ministerio de Educacion del Peru: 4.

³⁹ Massiel Arregui, former officer the Arts and Culture unit, Peruvian Ministry of Education (2016-2021), personal communication, December 2022.

context and based on outdated interpretations. Therefore, the result is that school students take on Peru's past with an uninspired history that is not engaging; a past which seems hard to relate with their own contemporary lives. Primary school education needs urgent updating, in terms of content but also in the learning experience.

One solution would be to foster a more updated curriculum and to bring the Ministry of Education closer to academia, to the archaeological projects and to the national, private and regional universities that teach archaeology.⁴⁰ This is the topic of another study. However, the other solution, which can be achieved in the short term, is to complement the learning of archaeology in schools with content developed within spaces of non-formal learning, such as in museums, where teaching information is derived directly from current scholarship. Due to lack of resources and grants, these initiatives are scarce and isolated. In Peru, these normally come from independent schools with larger budgets, which have established collaborations with specific archaeological projects to create other active learning experiences. Other forms of engagement include community initiatives to promote active learning in local archaeological sites.

While museums have been working towards establishing closer links to the Curriculum, as a result of the establishment of new departments of Education⁴¹, Public programmes and Outreach, these initiatives tend to be local, seeking to fill in the gaps the state system has failed to tackle. These museum visits are normally arranged by educational officers who approach teachers in schools with packages tackling topics from the School Syllabus. However, due to economic reasons, these visits normally come from independent and wealthier schools, located in the vicinity.

⁴⁰ For decades the only universities that taught Archaeology in Peru were the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú (founded in the late 1970's) and the Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos (1551). While the former forms part of the Faculty of Humanities, the latter is taught within the Department of Social Studies. These two have remained as the most prestigious Archaeology schools in Peru, despite other universities starting programmes such as Universidad Federico Villareal, Universidad Nacional de Trujillo and the Universidad Nacional San Antonio Abad, in Cusco.

⁴¹ MALI appointed its first Curator of Education in 2015 and its first Curator for Public Programmes in 2019.

There have been a handful of relevant initiatives that have attempted to build bridges between Archaeology and Education in museums.

Arte para Aprender (Art for learning). This pilot project, a MALI collaboration with the Telefónica Foundation (today Movistar, a telecommunications multinational), aimed at complementing formal learning in schools with more accessible and dynamic experiences in museums. The project sought to link different topics developed in the museum to modules from the National Curriculum, which are not necessarily linked to subjects related to the Arts and Culture, like Maths, for example. It resulted in a series of five exhibitions with learning packages,⁴² produced between 2005 and 2008, which benefited thousands of students from private and state schools in Lima. *Arte para Aprender* established the framework for future exhibitions at MALI, including those presented as part of this PhD.⁴³

Qhapaq Ñan education project. The Qhapaq Ñan project (hereafter QN) is an autonomous division of the Ministry of Culture dedicated to preserving and studying the Inca road system, which comprises more than 40,000 km across the Andes, many sections of which are still in use today. QN is run by professional archaeologists and active researchers. Its education project, beginning in 2014, comprised a series of school workshops aimed at discovering the road network's vast cultural heritage (e.g., archaeological sites, landscape features, traditional practices) and expressing value and respect for it. The activities were structured following the topics proposed in the National Curriculum for the areas of Personal and Social Education (primary school) and History, Geography and Economy (secondary school).⁴⁴

These examples show simple and innovative ways to communicate the past through non-formal learning experiences. The situation of heritage education in Peru would probably improve significantly if these initiatives formed part of the compulsory activities fostered by the Ministry of Education. However, for the moment, they are only isolated initiatives.

⁴² These contained guidelines for teachers, activity books for students to be produced both at school and during the exhibition experience.

⁴³ For more information, see <https://mali.pe/portfolio-item/arte-para-aprender>.

⁴⁴ Contreras, 2014.

Having characterised the place that archaeology holds in education in Peru, I will now consider how archaeology has been displayed in Peruvian museums, and then illustrate how my case studies in this critical analysis comprise responses and contributions of a new trend in the country's archaeological museology.

2.2.2 The birth and development of museums

The historical context in which Peruvian museums were born and developed has played a major role in the its tradition of archaeological display. Even though the first national museum can be traced back to the beginnings of the Republic in the mid-19th century, it took nearly a century to establish solid heritage institutions in charge of preserving and displaying the country's past for the public.⁴⁵

This delay was due to the problems of a young state, figuring out its political complexities, but also due to the booming interest in Peru's past among foreign collectors, which subsequently led to collections leaving the country.⁴⁶ This situation worsened with the War of the Pacific,⁴⁷ which led to the looting of public collections, the temporary closure of the National Museum, and a stagnation in the development of its collections. In the ensuing years, however, there was an upsurge in private interest in collecting, which developed alongside the birth of professional archaeology and the first systematic archaeological excavations.

⁴⁵ Pardo, 2010, 2012 and 2021.

⁴⁶ Riviale, 1996; Pardo, 2012; Some of the most well-known foreign scientists and explorers who wrote about Peru were: Alexander von Humboldt, Clements Markham, Adolf Bandelier, Charles Wiener and Antonio Raimondi.

⁴⁷ The Pacific War (1879-1883), against Chile, was a tragic event that resulted in the plundering of many public museum collections.

The first archaeological collections were formed by individuals, entrepreneurs and amateur collectors of antiquities,⁴⁸ and exhibited in their own private spaces. Some of these collections would eventually be set up as the founding holdings for modern public institutions. This was the case with some of the most important pre-Columbian museums in Lima, like the Museo Larco (founded 1949) or Museo Amano (founded 1964), where the displays followed the views of their original collectors. Curators have since made them accessible through permanent displays and visible storage.

The founding collection of the Museo de Arte de Lima (MALI) was also formed in the early years of the twentieth century, specifically by the politician and intellectual Javier Prado Ugarteche (Lima, 1871-1921). Prado set up his own museum, which was a product of his interest in the past, which also extended to the Peru of his day.⁴⁹ Since its opening, the collections were displayed in the museum's permanent galleries following the standard chronology of the main pre-Columbian styles.

Yet MALI did not carry out research-based temporary exhibitions. Before the series of exhibitions (detailed below), MALI had only carried out one exhibition in the late 1990s dedicated to displaying Chancay objects in relation to contemporary art.⁵⁰ This contrasts with the great number of exhibitions that have taken place in North America and Europe in recent years, most of which have been conceived and developed by non-Peruvian institutions.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ganger, 2014; Pardo, 2012; Among the collections that left the country were Macedo's collection, sold to Berlin's Museum fur Volkerkunde in 1886 and the two collections of Gaffron, sold to New York and Munich in 1902 and 1907, respectively.

⁴⁹ Portocarrero, 2007: 103.

⁵⁰ Under the title of "La Contemporaneidad del Arte Chancay" the exhibition involved the participation of figures from the Artistic Scene such as Fernando de Szyszlo.

⁵¹ Some of the major recent shows include: *Golden Kingdoms: Luxury and Legacy in the Ancient Americas*, Getty Center, Los Angeles and Metropolitan Museum of Art of New York, 2017-2018; *Inca-Kings of the Andes* Linden Museum, Stuttgart 2013-2014; *Wari - Lords of the Ancient Andes* Cleveland Museum of Art, Museum of Art, Fort Lauderdale, Florida and the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas, 2012-2013; *Peru. Kingdoms of the Sun and the Moon. Identities and Conquest in the Early, Colonial and Modern Period* Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, Montreal and Seattle Art Museum, 2013-2014; *Mochica Kings: Divinity and Power in Ancient Peru* Ethnography Museum of Geneva, Switzerland, 2014-2015, and only recently a touring exhibition by the name of *Machu Picchu y los Tesoros del Peru*, Larco Museum, 2022-2023.

The historical context described above has impacted how private and state-run museums still operate today. According to the *Ley de Patrimonio Cultural de la Nación*,⁵² the State protects the cultural legacy and supports the conservation, restoration, exhibition and dissemination of the country's cultural legacy regardless of its private or public status. In practice, this support is negligible and largely symbolic. Private museums, such as MALI, Amano or Larco, do not receive any fixed economic resources from the government to conserve their holdings nor to operate, so they have to seek their own funding, both to survive and to develop exhibitions.

Having worked in a self-funded institution for over fifteen years, this has had its challenges for my work, but it also came with a series of opportunities. Non-state museums have much more freedom in what they can carry out; they can manage their staff structure according to their specific needs and can manage their own discourse, namely, what is presented to the public and behind-the-scenes operations in administration and curation. Fundraising is a daily task in these institutions and demands constant creativity and perseverance. In contrast, state-run museums receive a specific annual budget from the central government that is proportional to its size and format. However, these resources tend to be quite restricted and depend on the bureaucratic system led by the *Dirección General de Museos*, the organ responsible for museums at the *Ministerio de Cultura*. The deficiencies in the state system are also reflected in the museum narratives; the nature and delivery of archaeological coverage at the National Museum, for example, have been in a never-ending flux since its beginnings back in the nineteenth century. In the realm of state institutions, the archaeological discourse is led by the *Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú* (MNAAHP). However, Peruvians still await what the recently founded and somewhat controversial *Museo Nacional del Perú* (MUNA) will propose. In response to this museum vacuum, MALI has filled the gap as the main panoramic museum with a narrative focused on the history of Peruvian art across time, from pre-Columbian times until the present. My work and exhibitions carried out at MALI proceeded largely independently from the state (*the national dialogue between archaeology and art history is detailed in Section 4.2*).

⁵² *Ley de Patrimonio Cultural de la Nación*. Published in *El Peruano*, July 22nd, 2004.

2.2.3 Models of archaeological display

Some of the few relevant initiatives to display the Andean past in recent decades, developed locally, concerned the north coast region of Peru. Archaeological work surged due to the discovery of the royal tombs of Sipán in 1987 leading to a series of national and international exhibits. But apart from the beauty and quality of the objects recovered from Sipán, the main relevance lay in the integrity of the professionally excavated contexts and artefacts, which fostered new and necessary reconsideration of Moche culture and society. Even though looted Moche objects are scattered across museums worldwide, they will never have the same relevance, as the lack of context limits the possibilities of creating stories and appealing to/educating wider audiences with them.⁵³

Sipán marked the beginning of a booming interest in Peru's north coast archaeology, resulting in more projects and funding to preserve, study and promote new sites, alongside the display of its material culture.⁵⁴ In 2002, after being displayed in various museums worldwide, the objects from Sipán were permanently installed in the Museo Tumbas Reales de Sipán (Lambayeque, Peru). This was followed by other initiatives focused on creating exhibition spaces for new archaeological discoveries. The Museo de Sicán, established 2001, in Ferreñafe, exhibits the objects found (1992-1995) in the elite tombs of Huaca Loro.⁵⁵ The site museum of Túcume (Lambayeque) has developed a productive model of working with local communities. Similar initiatives featured in the new site museums of El Brujo at Magdalena de Cao, opened in 2009, and the Huaca de la Luna museum in Trujillo (est. 2010). These site museums and their exhibitions, most of which were curated by archaeologists and curators of education, are milestones in making Peruvian archaeology accessible to the wider public.

This brief summary of archaeological display in Peru is relevant because my projects constitute complementary and, I argue, often critical parts of this ongoing history.

⁵³ Lumbreras, 1994.

⁵⁴ Pardo, 2014: 24.

⁵⁵ Shimada, 1995.

Throughout my work, I have proceeded with the outlook that Peruvians require access to updated and accessible information to start thinking critically and decide for themselves how they want to relate to their own past. They have the right, for example, to know that the Moche and the Chimu were not the only cultures that existed on the north coast and that the archaeologists normally create the names of the cultures as labels to understand their own field better. Similarly, the images we have from the Incas are a construct created during the Colonial Period.⁵⁶ They should also know that the khipu was not only used to count numbers but also narrated stories and poems, and that archaeology is under constant change and debate, that new discoveries are regularly made. Our past is in flux and far from being a closed book and a mere succession of ancient art and pottery styles.

These cases and my work are changing the poor tradition of Peruvians visiting museums, which can be explained by the lack of resources to produce engaging exhibitions⁵⁷ and the distant or confusing relationship with their past. In 2019, a pre-Covid time, for example, the 56 museums run by the Ministerio de Cultura del Peru, 60% of which are archaeological museums, registered 2,121,000 visitors.⁵⁸ This is a third of what the British Museum alone receives yearly. The most visited museum, the Museo Tumbas Reales de Sipán, which exhibits one of the country's archaeological landmark discoveries, only reached 185,000 visitors in 2019.

My exhibitions at MALI, which I present comprehensively in the next section, relate to a post-Sipán interest conceived and developed completely by Peruvians. In particular, they establish new foundations and ways for Peruvians to engage with their pasts, one in which we have proposed new narratives, incorporated updated scientific research, and fostered multidisciplinary collaborations, in high-standard displays.

⁵⁶ See Juan Carlos Estenssoro, 2005.

⁵⁷ These include economic resources and as well as the lack existing curators in the field. Only in the last decade, a couple of Peru-based MA degrees have been created in Museology. Similarly, there are only a handful of curators whose practice is focused in Andean Archaeology, the majority of whom have been trained abroad.

⁵⁸ <https://museos.cultura.pe/estadistica-de-visitantes>.

III. New trends towards displaying ancient Peru. Case studies

I will now detail the context and circumstances of this curatorial work. Due to word limits, a detailed account of the challenges and solutions of each project is presented in Table 2 (Appendix B). In general, the exhibitions were aimed at a broad range of visitors, from academics and specialists to school groups and families. They were diverse and multidimensional; each demanded a different responsibility and approach from my curatorial research and practice. It resulted from teamwork, where I played a predominant role in supervising the research, exhibition content and narrative, design, display, and public programmes.

3.1 *De Cupisnique a los incas. El arte del valle de Jequetepeque (2009-2010)*



Fig. 1. Display of *De Cupisnique a los incas*. MALI, 2010.

De Cupisnique a los incas was a much-needed project. It was the first temporary exhibition dedicated to a pre-Columbian project at MALI in decades, and it filled in a significant gap in the local museum scene. At the time, this was the only museum that sought to develop research-led major temporary exhibitions with its ancient Peruvian collections.

We held the exhibition in MALI's smaller temporary gallery (120 m²), from April to July 2010. A reduced version travelled to The Americas Society, in New York.⁵⁹ The project's overall aim was to present a regional story of ancient cultural development within the scope of a broader Andean prehistory. It also explicitly reflected on how museums can enrich their collections through coherent strategies of acquisition and curation.

The starting point was a selection of pre-Columbian objects from the Jequetepeque Valley acquired by MALI in 2007. Jequetepeque is a culturally diverse region on the north coast of Peru. The lot, comprising 73 objects, was a small but significant sample of the collection formed by entrepreneur Oscar Rodríguez Razzetto from the 1950s to 1990s, which is still considered one of the country's most important private pre-Columbian collections.⁶⁰

The team at MALI selected the objects with the advice of external scholars⁶¹ based on the needs of MALI's existing collections. Through material culture, primarily ceramics,⁶² they represent testimonies of the societies that inhabited this region and its area of influence, from the Formative Period to the Inca (c.1200 BC to AD1532). Even though Jequetepeque became part of the area of influence of relevant cultures like Moche, Lambayeque or Chimú, it always maintained its particularities in material culture.⁶³ For example, the specific styles

⁵⁹ 'Art and Myth in Ancient Peru. The history of the Jequetepeque Valley', Americas Society, New York, September-October 2010.

⁶⁰ Pardo, 2010: 27.

⁶¹ Archaeologists Luis Jaime Castillo and Krzysztof Makowski advised on the selections.

⁶² Due to its plasticity and portability, in ancient Peru clay was the main medium for communication and dissemination of belief systems. Ceremonial vessels, achieved through different techniques like modelling and molding, and finished through firing, are recognised as one of the most important pottery traditions of the ancient world. See: Pardo, 2021: 50.

⁶³ Castillo, Luis Jaime, 2010.

manifest distinctive local changes resulting from external influences from highland societies like Recuay, Cajamarca and Huari.⁶⁴

MALI's initiative to integrate this collection was part of a new acquisitions policy aimed at providing a more comprehensive vision of ancient Peru. Despite the vastness of the museum's collections, the collection had gaps, including the north coast cultures.⁶⁵ Moreover, the acquisition emphasised giving space and priority to the regional stories⁶⁶ rather than reproducing established chronologies and narratives. Following the acquisition, a research project began in collaboration with a group of external scholars, resulting in an exhibition, a publication and a public programme.

We exhibited the collection to materialise the complex and diverse cultural history around the modern cities of Trujillo and Chiclayo. The north coast is one of the most studied Andean regions, but its history had never been presented beyond academic spaces. Given the nature of the collection, amassed mainly through local dealers, we also wanted to identify, wherever possible, the provenance and specific archaeological contexts of the objects, thus providing them with an array of new possibilities for their interpretation, display, and education.

I structured the exhibition considering four main narratives. The first showcased the main cultural sequence of the Jequetepeque's early cultures, as represented by objects from the new collections, complemented by loans from recent regional excavations. The second narrative displayed a group of vessels depicting different images associated with the Moche. This culture played an essential role in the valley's development between AD100 and 800. We did this to explore the importance of ceramic ritual vessels as mediums of elite communication and ruling ideologies. My curatorial and editorial work aimed at illuminating an ancient society with very complex belief systems, where rituals, carried out by human beings, were intertwined with myths.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Pardo, *ibid.*: 28.

⁶⁶ Castillo, *ibid.*: 35.

⁶⁷ *De Cupisnique a los incas* exhibition. MALI, 2010 (Appendix C). See also, for example: Donnan, 1976.

The next display presented two objects from the new acquisition next to two very similar ones, which came from recent archaeological excavations. They were displayed beside a drawing of the tombs and their exact place within the funerary context. The installation aimed to contrast how archaeology can enrich the knowledge of museum collections, which usually lack contextual evidence. It provided information for identifying iconographic, stylistic and functional associations, thus allowing visitors to learn and recognise new narratives, in addition to the irreparable damage of grave-robbing.

Through a selection of objects depicting plants, animals and deities from different periods, the final installation, *Mythology and Environment*, gave visitors clues to the Jequetepeque environment and human adaptations. The exploitation of marine resources and cultivation, so essential for obtaining food, depended on favourable weather conditions and the divine forces behind them. Consequently, this display focused on how the ancient people created a material world focused on sacred animals and deified beings with whom they maintained contact and to whom they paid tribute through ceremonies and priest-led rituals.

I edited the publication alongside Luis Jaime Castillo, an eminent Peruvian archaeologist. It featured articles from the main cultural periods by different leading scholars, and I coordinated the detailed captions for each object from the acquisition showcased in the exhibition. The introductory essay, submitted as part of this PhD by publication, placed this new acquisition in its broad context of collection histories. It begins by describing the importance of each object, as individual testimonies of a particular style and period, but also as a group of interdependent objects with their own context and history. The acquisition is a prime example of how Peruvian museum collections were formed. These personal-to-museum efforts allowed for the creation of public collections to provide didactic access to the Peruvian past.⁶⁸ I then described a brief history, beginning ca. the 19th century, when the first public museums and private collections were born, to discuss how the historical events of a young nation had a significant impact on early collecting. In this regard, the institutional ascendancy of MALI in the late 2000s, and the recent acquisition, born from a regional initiative, formed a key moment in the history of collections and public museums in Peru.

⁶⁸ Pardo, 2010: 27.

De Cupisnique a los incas was my first exhibition at MALI, and in retrospect, it was an experimental initiative whose main scope arose from the conversations following the incorporation of a new collection. It was, without doubt, a pivotal project that would guide the projects (both of MALI and my own) to come. In particular, it was based on intensive collaborations with external scholars in archaeology, an approach that was limited in the past. It also presented a new model of treating archaeological collections within an art history museum and a curatorial framework for collaborations, discussions and developing public programmes. Finally, it was also my first experience in managing a project from its inception, which gave me insight into the challenges arising, including fundraising, limited staff and deadlines.

3.2 Modelando el mundo. Imágenes de la arquitectura precolombina (2011-2012)



Fig. 2. Gallery 1 of *Modelando el mundo*. MALI, 2011-2012.

MALI's acquisition of the Jequetepeque collection in 2007 included Moche and Lambayeque objects depicting architecture and the built landscape. This drew our curatorial gaze to a topic that never had been addressed in a large exhibition. Essentially, curatorial questions that arose out of *De Cupisnique* inspired a new research topic and established the foundations for *Modelando el mundo*, my next project. The exhibition's title and core research topics came from an eponymously named international symposium hosted by the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú in June 2010. The event was organised by Luis Jaime Castillo (Department of Archaeology), Jose Canziani and Paulo Dam (Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism), who became the academic advisors to the MALI project.

The main topic was to reflect on the imagery of architecture and its creation, which pre-Columbian peoples regularly portrayed. Such objects are seen today as depictions of ancient buildings, plazas, houses, funeral chambers or as magnified and stylised versions of ceremonial constructions. Until only several years ago, however, the primary studies on

architectural models had been based on objects from private and public collections, mostly lacking known contexts. Because of recent archaeological discoveries of a series of models and real-life buildings and monuments in the Andean area, especially the north coast, we developed the exhibit as an opportunity to confront real-life monuments with representations that embody an idealised conception of space, scale and the context of human activity.

We displayed *Modelando el mundo* in two of MALI's temporary galleries. The exhibition brought together around 70 objects from different local and national museums and, notably, from recent archaeological projects (e.g., Sipán, San José de Moro, Huaca de la Luna).⁶⁹

The scope, which followed the PUCP symposium's structure, explored the function of the architecture representations and models and asked whether they served as precise models for the pre-Columbian architect or as idealised references.⁷⁰ Through specific objects and their provenance from funerary contexts, the exhibition also discussed how people might have used them in ceremonies and eventually take them to the afterlife. The project was unique in bringing together a dialogue between archaeology, art history and architecture, three disciplines with different methodologies, and we wanted to foster open conversations within the museum space.

We organised the exhibition along three main themes, each addressing pertinent research investigations. The first displayed a selection of ceramic vessels in the form of architectural buildings, or which displayed painted or modelled buildings, focusing on the specific styles and their changes through time, from the Chavín to the Inca. The long-term research on pre-Columbian architecture and the development of urbanism in the Andes carried out by architect Jose Canziani guided this section.⁷¹

Archaeological investigations in recent decades have shed significant light on the depiction of Moche and Chimu architecture. Previously, these images could only be interpreted based on formal aspects. The following section of *Modelando*, thus revealed broader concerns to

⁶⁹ Alva and Donnan, 1993; Uceda, 1997; Castillo and Nelson, 1997.

⁷⁰ Pardo, 2012.

⁷¹ Canziani, 2009.

the public, such as spatial distribution and construction details found archaeologically, enabling possible connections to be made with full-scale versions.

Advised by Luis Jaime Castillo's research, it presented three main case studies from this region. The first explored the aesthetic quality and importance of a Chimu architectural model recovered from a looted intrusive tomb at the site of Huaca de la Luna. Made out of carved wood with shell inlays, the model represents a scene within a palace, where a group of figures appear preparing beverages, carrying goods and playing musical instruments, paying homage to three funerary bundles, their ancestors.⁷² Based on the model's layout, the object has been associated with palace-like complexes known at Chan Chan, the Chimu capital (AD 900-1400), where similar ceremonies might have taken place.⁷³

We also exhibited clay models found inside funerary chambers (at the site of San José de Moro); such objects related to the ritual practices and people who were buried in the tombs.⁷⁴ Finally, a set of Moche vessels having architectural features such as steps and platforms, presented the study of art historian Juliet Wiersema, who proposed comparisons between the representations and the full-scale buildings.⁷⁵

⁷² Pardo, 2020: 141.

⁷³ Uceda, 1997.

⁷⁴ Castillo et al., 1997.

⁷⁵ Wiersema, 2010; Pardo, 2020: 220-221.



Fig. 3. Gallery 2 of *Modelando el mundo* with objects showing synthesised forms of architecture and the models of San Jose de Moro at the back. MALI, 2011-2012.

The third exhibition space focused on the formal study of the object. Guided by the architect Paulo Dam, it emphasised striking depictions of stylised architecture in pottery and textiles, highlighting details of lines, space and the different versions of stepped designs in architecture, interpreted as symbolic forms.

We edited the exhibition catalogue to incorporate essays by the project advisors and other scholars studying the topic of pre-Columbian architecture, including studies by noted architectural and art historians.

My introductory essay introduced the subject of architectural representations in the art history and archaeology of the ancient world, exploring examples from China, Egypt, Greece and Rome, and Mesoamerica before giving an overview of the study of pre-Columbian architecture models, from the mid-20th century to the present. Finally, the essay describes the exhibition's main narratives (discussed above) and how they worked in the exhibition space.

Modelando was a huge success in bringing new audiences to the museum. Star objects like the Huaca de la Luna model and other objects from regional museums attracted many people from Lima who hadn't had the chance to see them in person. Moreover, it was an opportunity to inform museum audiences about architectural practices in the past, a little-known topic, but of obvious resonance. Regarding the practical lessons learned, most objects were loans from different parts of the country, leading to extremely high shipping costs. The next project, *Castillo de Huarmey*, was the opposite of *Modelando* as the exhibition and catalogue presented a unique discovery and one specific event in time.

3.3 Castillo de Huarmey. El Mausoleo Imperial Wari (2014)



Fig. 4. Introductory panel to the *Castillo de Huarmey* exhibition; displays the introduction text, a 3D site model and a map, MALI, 2014.

Castillo de Huarmey was a timely project —almost fortuitous— in the history of exhibitions at MALI. It began in September 2012, with a call from Krzysztof Makowski, a member of MALI’s advisory academic committee, about an extraordinary archaeological discovery requiring urgent conservation and temporary storage.

In the previous weeks The Castillo de Huarmey Archaeological Research Project (hereafter PIACH), led by Polish archaeologist Milosz Giersz, had unveiled an elite mausoleum dating to the Middle Horizon Period (AD 600-1000) from the coastal site of Castillo de Huarmey, Ancash. Around 60 women were buried in the mausoleum, alongside 1,300 exceptional ceremonial offerings and grave goods.⁷⁶ It represented a landmark in the study of pre-Columbian funerary contexts. Although it was not part of the museum exhibition programme

⁷⁶ Giersz, 2014: 69-99.

—which usually is planned two years in advance— it was a proposal that we could not refuse.

Undertaking the project was attractive and essential for two reasons. First, it was the first exhibition dedicated to a scientifically excavated archaeological context ever presented at MALI, and certainly one of the few displayed in Peruvian museums. As the great majority of Peruvian archaeological museums were formed from private initiatives, up until the 1980s most had focused on objects lacking provenance and context, except for specific state archaeological expeditions to stock museums with cultural materials.⁷⁷ And second, the exhibition disseminated an exciting discovery that would rewrite the story of the Wari culture, the Andes' first empire, and its influence across the ancient Andes.

Before PIACH began, the site was known primarily for its heavy looting and its objects in the antiquities market. After the first scientific expedition in the 1930s (made by Julio C. Tello, an important Peruvian archaeologist), the site was explored by other scholars⁷⁸ and collectors. Most notably, Japanese collector Yoshitaro Amano made several visits and eventually formed one of the main pre-Hispanic collections that originated in the Huarmey Valley. Fine textiles, basketry and wooden artefacts now held by the Museo Amano in Lima stand out among the hundreds of pieces recovered at Huarmey.⁷⁹ Previously, the record was important for a hybrid style of colourful textiles, combining coastal and highland traits once described as “Moche-Wari”⁸⁰ recovered during surveys and through illicit activities. For the first time, the new work at Castillo de Huarmey and our exhibition provide direct context for such textiles, which had always been studied as isolated pieces in history. Recontextualising museum objects was and remains crucial to my curatorial work, aimed at enriching the museum narratives.

⁷⁷ For such expeditions, see Tello and Mejia Xesspe, 1967.

⁷⁸ Including Bonavía, Horkheimer, Engel, Ubbelohde-Doering and Prümers; See also Giersz, 2014.

⁷⁹ Simón Ricarde, conservator at the Museo Amano, personal communication, 2013.

⁸⁰ Conklin, 1979.

In order to get to know the objects and their context, the first stage included inventorying and cataloguing the whole assemblage, which established a preliminary object list and conservation/display protocols. This process involved georeferencing the objects in the tombs and technical drawings of the objects.

With the exhibition, my team and I highlighted the relevance of studying a rare, intact discovery, that had escaped the experienced eyes of the looters. The elite tomb was placed in a broader context of previous archaeological studies, and we were able to use the objects to develop panel and catalogue texts on approaches to power, gender, technical production and the coexistence of cultures and traditions in the Andes. It also presented a unique opportunity to contextualise other collections found in the valley and region, now held in major Lima museums.

We placed a scale reconstruction of the mausoleum (13.5 x 11.5 m) centrally in the gallery and projected a 3D animation showing the different layers of the tomb. Surrounding it, we displayed a selection of funerary offerings consisting of necklaces, rings, metal plates, ceramic vessels, and more than 60 pairs of ear ornaments of exceptional quality.



Fig. 5. View of the reconstruction of the tomb, with projections showing different levels of the dig and a selection of the objects found, MALI, 2014.

We also highlighted hundreds of objects related to textile weaving (e.g. spindle rods, needles, yarn); their presence in the tomb suggests the close relationship of these noble women with weaving, like we see in other Andean societies.



Fig. 6. Display of the gold and silver ear plates found in the tomb, showing how the women wore them. Images on the walls present the intricate embossed motifs in the objects. MALI, 2014.

The edited volume was the first major effort to disseminate the PIACH research to the broader public. Essays provided context to the discovery, placing it within the scope of the Wari Empire, and described the excavation process and the recovered objects.⁸¹

My introductory essay placed the exhibition in the context of other recent temporary and permanent exhibitions devoted to important archaeological investigations, most notably those focused on the North Coast since the 80s and 90s (detailed above). My essay also emphasised the exhibition's aim to fulfil the museum's purpose of sharing new stories about a past—one that is in permanent construction—with wider audiences.

Like Sipán (discussed in Section 2.2.2), *Castillo de Huarmey* centred on an intact elite tomb discovery. It proved that MALI's curatorial and conservation team could work under tight deadlines and deliver an exhibition which earned critical acclaim and several national awards.

⁸¹ Giersz, 2014.

3.4 *Moche y sus vecinos. Reconstruyendo identidades* (2016)



Fig. 7. Gallery 1 of *Moche y sus vecinos* shows the introductory text and two Moche vessels, one displaying a Moche warrior and the other a foreign warrior. MALI, 2016.

Moche y sus vecinos resulted from a collaboration with archaeologist Julio Rucabado, whose research focused on the complex relationships between the Moche peoples and neighbouring societies between AD 100 and 800. The aim was to introduce visitors to the way societies define themselves through different cultural expressions such as language, rituals or clothing, forming a collective identity that is recognisable and differentiable from other groups. Although the concept of otherness had been addressed in a number of studies in Peruvian archaeology, it was the first exhibition and museum project that explored the topic. This theme engaged Moche's complex belief system and their relationships with neighbouring societies.

We conceptualised the exhibition around a circular, central space in the gallery. Here we installed objects that spoke to Moche cosmivision and relationships with the world. This design choice aimed to locate the Moche-centric vision outwards towards its neighbours.

We presented pottery vessels depicting plants, animals, mythical beings and ritual ceremonies in different habitats and landscapes, from the coast to the eastern highlands. Ai-Apaec, the Moche main deity, was shown in the middle of this recreated world. In Moche mythology, he is the mythical hero who embarks on journeys of conflict and negotiations with outsiders to restore the balance of the Moche world.



Fig. 8. Circular space showing the Moche cosmovision and Ai-Apaec deity in the centre. MALI, 2016.

In the surrounding space, we designed four sections that explored the relationships between the Moche and foreign communities through the lenses of the object's iconography. These included ritual battles between Mochica and foreign warriors, the stylistic relationship between the Mochica and Recuay styles, the negotiation scenes that refer to possible links with Cajamarca, and finally, the representation of foreign characters associated with the eastern slopes of the Andes, perceived as an undomesticated world.

One of the objects we highlighted was a striking and intricate Moche ritual cape made from leather, copper, resin and feathers, found as an offering. The same cape is worn by Ai-Apaec, as seen in sculptural and pictorial vessels, during special ceremonies of negotiations with other groups to ensure the health and prosperity of the community.



Fig. 9. Moche cape made from cloth, copper, resin, bone and semi-precious stones found in Huaca de la Luna. MALI, 2016.

The final exhibition space revealed Moche mythical stories through a selection of images replicated in large panels. They formed a series of scenes showing the journey of Ai-Apaec, across his battles, struggles and conquest of foreign territories. Here we stressed that these relationships, whether of conflict or negotiation, were also part of the mythological realm, which constantly intertwined with the world of humans.

My role in this project was to coordinate and help develop the object captions and essays, intended for scholars and the public. In my view, the main contribution of *Moche y sus vecinos* was to transcend treating ancient cultures as an isolated phenomenon, and to exploring (Moche) identity in the context of its relationships with other groups. The essay that guided the main narrative of the show (Julio Rucabado), proposed a reconstruction of the history of Moche before state consolidation, emphasising the migratory movements from the highlands and the interethnic relations as a background for the establishment of later mythical and ritual discourses. The publication includes studies on intercultural relations that Moche

had with highland societies such as Recuay and Cajamarca, and the results of bioarchaeological research carried out to determine the presence of foreign groups in Moche populations.⁸²

Not long after, we embarked on *Nasca*, the most ambitious pre-Columbian exhibition ever held at MALI.

⁸² See Pardo and Rucabado, 2016.

3.5 Nasca (2017)



Fig. 10. Introductory panel, Nasca show. MALI, 2017.

Nasca was the result of a research project collaboration with the Rietberg Museum, Zurich and the Nasca-Palpa Archaeological Project, which had investigated the region since 1991.⁸³ The exhibition was presented in Lima (July-October 2017), before it travelled to different venues in Europe: the Rietberg Museum (November 2017), the Bundeskunsthalle, Bonn (May-July 2018) and the Telefónica Foundation, Madrid (February-April 2019).

The starting point was a working group that I organised to raise core discussions and agree on the main narratives and curatorial strategies for the exhibition. The 2016 event featured more than fifteen Peruvian and international scholars and was the first major meeting between Nasca specialists since 1994. Some of the key discussions centred around the debates on Nasca origins and its links to their predecessors, known as the Paracas culture, the way they

⁸³ Reindel, 2009.

thrived in one of the aridest deserts in the world, and how their lives and beliefs interfaced with the famous Nasca lines or geoglyphs.

The first exhibition space introduced the visitors to the Nasca world and their ways of life in the desert by displaying their own imagery of plants, animals, human beings and rituals depicted in objects. A digital media element showed how the desert boundaries began to extend during the time of the Nasca due to climate change and human deforestation, which led to changes in settlement patterns. In the centre of the gallery, we exhibited an installation of objects found at the main site of Cahuachi, the most important centre of Nasca society in its early phase. Photographs of the site hung from wall panels.

To examine Nasca origins, we decided to display objects found as part of funerary bundles in earlier sites associated with the Paracas culture. Archaeologist Ann Peters helped us to select the textiles and other objects belonging to three Early Nasca bundles. We elected to present the objects, mostly textiles, on low platforms alongside drawings that were made in the 1920s at the time of their excavation, accompanied by a 3D animation of how the bundles would have been wrapped.

We used this section also as an opportunity to reflect critically on terms given by archaeologists to name cultures. While changes in pottery style may reflect transforming cultures, we emphasised how DNA analysis had recently confirmed that the Paracas and Nasca were the same people.⁸⁴

As in other Andean cultures, the Nasca system of beliefs was materialised in images and scenes linking the realm of humans and deities. We explored this topic through objects showing the transformation of the humans into ancestors, in a transitional space placed between the introductory gallery that dealt with Nasca life, and the display of the funerary objects from Tello's bundles, which showcased the world of the dead and ancestors. The layout was displayed around a large format Ceremonial Drum depicting a narrative that exemplifies the cycles of life, death and rebirth in Nasca mythology.

⁸⁴ Tomasto, 2016.



Fig. 11. Nasca Ceremonial Drum displayed in the section *Nasca: Mythology and Rituality*, MALI, 2017.

We dedicated an entire gallery to the “Sacred Landscape” to explore the nature, function and dimensions of the geoglyphs, the lines which extend over some 500 sq. km of desert plains. Two 3 x 2 m models based on a 3D scanning showed two regions with dense concentrations of lines and figures. Each model had a mapping projection showing the exact location of each geoglyph and a description of the figural representations. Surrounding the models, we displayed a selection of contemporary art photographs depicting different views of these sites. Pottery vessels also showed painted images of plants, animals and beings, all of which are also present in the geoglyphs.

In this project, we felt that it was crucial to place the geoglyphs in the context of the history of the Nasca and present new research on their making, function and symbolism. The fabulous lines and drawings in the desert are among Peru’s most significant heritage landmarks, but Peruvians relate to them in a very particular way. Their striking images of plants and animals form part of the collective memory, and one of them has even been used as the country’s logo to attract international tourism and commerce. However, very few

people have visited them and understand their nature and function, which fuel strange and fantastic interpretations about the geoglyphs (e.g., as extra-terrestrial creations). Previously, I have mentioned other interdisciplinary collaborations during my time at MALI. As in those, a crucial goal of *Nasca* was to collaborate with current scholars to dispel outdated stories and general preconceptions and to educate on Peru's ancient past and indigenous achievements.



Fig. 12. One of the two models displaying the Palpa and Nasca Geoglyphs, MALI, 2017.

The next space displayed drawings and textiles created by artists from the early 20th century, inspired by ancient Nasca pottery and vessels. This installation opened new discussions about other topics, such as the place of archaeology in Peruvian Modern Art and the creation of national identities. It also allowed my team to reconsider for the first time 20th-century collections practices and history in relation to the past, a topic I would resume in my subsequent projects, specifically *Khipus* (MALI, 2020) and *Peru. A Journey in Time* (British Museum, 2021).

The edited *Nasca* volume was published in Spanish (with translations in English) and later in German for European venues. The book brought together a series of essays tackling different topics: the history of the Nasca, geoglyphs, studies on iconography, funerary practices, and studies dedicated to specific objects and collections.

I authored the introductory essay with Peter Fux, and it explored the history of research on the Nasca, from Colonial times and how relevant collections were formed before and after scientific archaeology was introduced in Peru. This background is important given the abundance of Nasca collections housed in museums today. In fact, MALI's founding collection had a focus on the South Coast, and not the North. According to Julio C. Tello, given the value of Nasca then in the local and international market, merchants organised squads of looters (*huaqueros*) to empty cemeteries across the region.⁸⁵ Some examples of the objects Prado bought included outstanding late Paracas mantles, among the first that the Peruvian public came to know. This would lead Tello to pioneer research on the Paracas peninsula two decades later.⁸⁶

Altogether, my role in *Nasca* was not only as lead exhibition curator and book editor but also took oversight of the responsibilities of the other departments concerning the project. By this time, MALI had grown significantly in terms of its staff and capacity for fundraising, and because of this, such a comprehensive exhibition was possible. *Khipus*, the following project, was my last exhibition as a full-time curator at MALI, a project heavily impacted by Covid-19.

⁸⁵ Tello, s.f., p. 4.

⁸⁶ Daggett, 1991.

3.6 *Khipus. Nuestra historia en nudos*⁸⁷ (2020)

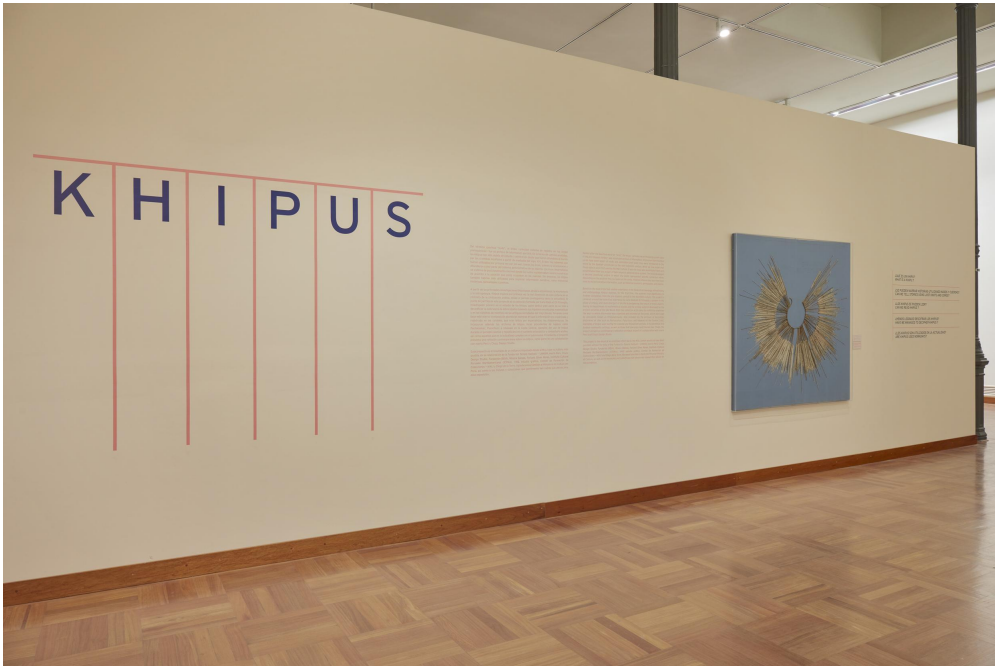


Fig. 13. Introductory panel, *Khipus*. MALI, 2020.

I led the curation of *Khipus* with the scientific advice of Gary Urton⁸⁸ to explore the nature and function of khipu, the primary but still poorly understood record-keeping system used in the ancient Andes. Even though there had been a few exhibitions in the past,⁸⁹ *Khipus* was the first to bring together a comprehensive selection from local and national collections and display the survival of this practice up to the present.

MALI does not hold khipu. Therefore, the starting point was a collaboration with the Temple-Radicati Foundation, the collection amassed by Italian collector and researcher Carlo

⁸⁷ Across this study, the word Khipu has been written in plural when referring to the Spanish title of the exhibition, and in singular when used in English.

⁸⁸ The collaboration with Gary Urton, which began in 2017, preceded the misconduct allegations published against him by the *Harvard Crimson*; Urton retired in 2020 and his Professor Emeritus status was removed in 2021.

⁸⁹ The symposium “Quipu and Tocado” was held at the Museo Nacional de Arqueología, Antropología e Historia del Perú in 2009, while Dumbarton Oaks, in Washington, displayed a handful of khipu in a small show “Written in Knots” in 2019.

Radicati Di Primeglio during the 1970s and 80s.⁹⁰ The agreement stated that MALI would receive the collection in custody as a long-term loan and in turn would undertake a project that secured the collection's research, study and display.

We designed the exhibition to welcome audiences first with a large format khipu (Fig.13). Alongside, we presented questions aimed to encourage critical thinking and develop their own responses. The function of khipu and how they register information has been studied for more than a century. However, there are still many loose 'threads' that provide a more open-ended and informative, educational experience. For example, some khipu registered numerical information, such as the number of births or deaths in a group, based on a decimal system of knotted cords. Still, the extent to which they recorded other forms of information, including narratives, is still under debate.

We curated three main exhibition spaces, or 'threads,' to guide the visitor. The first one explored the origins of khipu, and what information can be drawn by looking at them. A 3D animation introduced the main components of its structure and the elements that encoded information, such as knots, cords and attachments.



Fig. 14. Display of Numerical and narrative khipu and 3D animation showing the main structure and components of the khipu. *Khipus*, MALI, 2020.

⁹⁰ Radicati di Primeglio, 1949-1950 and 2006.

The second one displayed five sets of khipu found in different Inca sites to illustrate the critical roles played by this device in the management and expansion of the Inca Empire. In particular, we highlighted how they were used to register accounts, manage product stocks, and control local populations.

Finally, in the last exhibition space, we presented specimens and case studies to survey the prevalence of khipu *after* the European Conquest, a completely new story for Peruvian audiences. The striking tabla-khipu from San Cristóbal de Mangas (Fig. 15) was the critical installation in this gallery: it is one of the few objects known to combine written information and knotted cords in one object.⁹¹



Fig. 15. Display of the khipu board from Mangas and video showing the conservation of the Rapaz khipus, MALI, 2020.

This section included the contemporary use of khipu in two highland communities, Rapaz and Tupicocha, which have been extensively studied.⁹² Because taking them out of their communities was inappropriate, we gained permission to present them through images and

⁹¹ Hyland, 2020.

⁹² Salomon, 2002.

videos. We concluded the exhibition by displaying two contemporary art pieces which reflected on the aesthetic and conceptual aspects of khipu.

Overall, this was the first time a pre-Columbian exhibition at MALI established these transversal connections within the museum space, which has provided a template for more recent exhibitions. My previous projects had mainly focused on the pre-Columbian period, with little content relating to the period after the European Conquest. In this exhibition, we addressed the continuities of Khipu up to the present through objects and narratives that linked the pre-Columbian past with contemporary practices.

Khipus was the first exhibition where we involved the Curator of Education very early in the process, resulting in more content aimed at younger audiences and some unprecedented techniques to deliver this content. For instance, we incorporated an additional layer of information through “family labels” that related the objects and their messages with themes of contemporary life, such as information systems, finances or databases. It proved to be engaging and helped distil some of the complex explanations to decodify khipu.

Alongside each exhibition, we prepared a tailored programme for the benefit of primary and secondary schools. Despite the small Department of Education, school visits are a core priority within MALI, and these increase significantly during temporary exhibitions.

In sum, I have described the six exhibitions that form the core content of my PhD by Publication. Of 15 exhibitions,⁹³ I chose these based on two criteria: first, for the gaps they filled in the learning about the Peruvian past, as each one brings new knowledge to the museum space; and second, for how they convey other aspects of the curatorial work in museums.

The next section of this critical analysis examines and reflects on key aspects, such as the object journeys, including how collections were formed and the way we have looked at the objects, both critical aspects that have been present in my work.

⁹³ Other exhibitions include: *Portraits* co-curated with N. and L. Wuffarden (2005), *MALI: Formando Colecciones*, co-curated with N. Majluf (2008), *Textiles precolombinos en la colección del MALI* (2010), *Cerro de Oro: Una ciudad de barro en Cañete*, co-curated with F. Fernandini (2016), *Otras historias posibles: repensando las colecciones del MALI*, co-curated with R. Kusunoki, J. Rucabado and S. Lerner (2019).

IV. Underlying aspects of my curatorial strategies

Space limits a comprehensive overview of all the considerations that have shaped my work with objects. Hence here I will focus on two that have been especially critical to make particularly significant contributions to my curatorial practice. These concerns, first, how values and meanings are defined by objects' journeys; and, second, how we study, name or label objects from the past. Both domains have impacted and defined my six exhibitions and require consideration for Peru's museology in the future.

4.1 Object journeys

In section 1.2.2 we detailed how the meanings of ancient objects can shift in their trajectory, from the moment they were produced, to their discovery, and their eventual arrival and use in the museum. These new attributions depend on different constituencies, explorers, dealers, curators and audiences,⁹⁴ but also on institutions and the social and historical context in which they occur.

In Peru different cultural processes have shaped how pre-Columbian material culture has been valued and collected, from the Colonial Period to the twentieth century,⁹⁵ including the many collections that left the country during this period, leaving important gaps locally.⁹⁶

But, as noted in section 2.2.3, in a context devoid of solid institutions, the first archaeological collections were formed by individuals⁹⁷ whose collections would serve as foundations for later developments. Some of the most important Peruvian museums, including MALI were born from similar processes.

The core of MALI's pre-Columbian collections was acquired by Javier Prado during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (see also section 2.2.3). He left no records regarding

⁹⁴ Alberti, 2005: 561.

⁹⁵ Podgorny, Kohl and Ganger, 2014; Pardo, 2012.

⁹⁶ Pardo, 2021.

⁹⁷ Ganger, 2014.

the pieces' provenance nor from whom he had acquired them.⁹⁸ It is known that the fabulous collection of Nasca objects (including some featured in *Nasca*, in section 3.5), was acquired by known dealers who sponsored extensive looting of Nasca sites, which intensified following Uhle's discoveries in 1900.

When Prado's family donated the collection to the newborn MALI in 1961, it was shown to the museum's audiences as a complete and representative sample of the major ancient cultures of Peru, part of a long history of Peruvian art extending to the present. Only a small sample of the collection was put on display, and the rest was kept in storage.

This ideal of completeness, however, is far from true. Even though it has been stated that Prado's collection was born from the ambition to gather objects that could cover the history of Peru and represent it through its main periods, styles and civilisations,⁹⁹ he bought what was available in the market of antiquities at the time, probably also giving priority to his own personal values and choices.

As previously noted, MALI's collection of Moche artefacts was very poorly represented before the acquisition of the Rodriguez Razzetto collection, which led to our exhibition *De Cupisnique a los incas* (Section 3.1). Also, when we decided to organise *Modelando el mundo*, (Section 3.2), MALI had hardly any objects that could fit in the show's narratives. Similarly, the later *Khipus* exhibition (Section 3.6) arose even though MALI did not hold one single specimen; the possibility of a long-term loan of the Temple Radicati collection would open a window to begin studying and displaying khipu in the museum.

On reflection, part of what I attempted with my exhibitions was, on the one hand, to outline the biographies¹⁰⁰ of pre-Columbian objects; on the other, it was to extend their 'social life'¹⁰¹ by considering new layers of information, and thus giving them new values. They

⁹⁸ Pardo and Fux, 2017.

⁹⁹ Portocarrero, 2007: 103; Morales de la Torre, 1921.

¹⁰⁰ Alberti, 2005.

¹⁰¹ Hill Boone, 1993.

arrived with very few stories to tell. However, by inserting them into new situations and frameworks, like finding the possible provenance of the objects, recounting the stories about how they were discovered, or placing them in dialogue with objects coming from different museums, they could feel more vibrant and engaging.

An important example that gained “a new life” (or what Appadurai (1986) called an object’s changing pathway, or ‘diversion’) through my exhibitions was an Early Nasca funerary green mantle with embroidery, one of MALI’s stellar objects. Acquired by Prado in an antiquity shop in 1914, it became an important object for its size, antiquity, design and striking state of conservation. It was displayed in MALI’s permanent textile gallery for decades with hardly any interpretation. But with the *Nasca* exhibition and the provenance research that ensued, the object entered a new phase or diversion of its previous trajectory and became an important part of a new narrative. Firstly, due to its style, it is very likely that it came from the funerary site of Wari Kayán, a large burial settlement in the Paracas Peninsula, which had been looted for decades before Julio C. Tello’s 1925 excavations.¹⁰² This was also where part of the debate related to the end of Paracas and the beginnings of Nasca was addressed, based on the changes in the style of the funerary textiles and other offerings placed in the 429 bundles that Tello found. Ultimately, my work carried out for the exhibition gave this object new meanings, so it is not only admired for being an exceptional masterpiece, but for being more informative and there much more useful for audiences.

¹⁰² See Daggett, 1991.



Fig. 16. Early Nasca funerary mantle with embroidered designs. MALI, Prado Family Bequest (IV-2.1-0002).

4.2 Classifying objects

There is an ongoing debate about whether archaeological objects should be studied from the disciplines of art history or from anthropology, particularly since archaeology emerged in certain traditions together with anthropology. While archaeologists classify objects by their use and function, art historians classify them by aesthetic value, school, and style. As part of the debate, many scholars have questioned if pre-Columbian objects made within a specific historical and geographic context should be inscribed within the modern idea of “fine arts” or “art history,” as such, which emerged toward the end of the eighteenth century in Europe.¹⁰³

In Peru, both in academia and museums, pre-Hispanic collections have generally been studied from the discipline of archaeology rather than art history.¹⁰⁴ These studies have privileged iconographic study of works without archaeological context over the analysis of the objects themselves as relevant sources of information. With a few exceptions, curatorial work has continued to reinforce this apparent opposition, exhibiting the object either from a strictly formalist (visual aesthetics) perspective or from one that is purely archaeological.

¹⁰³ Clifford 1988: 189-214; see Pardo, 2020.

¹⁰⁴ Pardo, *ibid.*

With my exhibitions at MALI, an art museum with a panoramic focus on the history of Peruvian art, I was instrumental in helping merge both methodologies in their creation and curation. My work highlighted working with the objects from an art history perspective, but also bringing archaeological research, and provenance links whenever possible, thereby placing the objects in a wider social and historical context. We also aimed to discard outmoded associations and challenged common ‘wisdoms,’ like chronologies and function, and instead generated new semantic engagements between objects. Below, I present an example of this new direction.

In *De Cupisnique* we introduced the visitor to the history of the Jequetepeque region through its material culture. Objects representing the main periods were proposed in a sequence, each provided with the name of the local style. For a Moche fine-line vessel, rather than giving it the traditional “Moche V” or “Late Moche” chronological designation, I chose to label it with information and affiliation based on its place in recent discoveries. By doing this, we could now describe it as an object specially made for funerary purposes at the San Jose de Moro site, and very likely produced between AD 500 and 750. In the same way, other objects in these regional sequences were imbued with new meanings and associations and were linked to each other in new ways through labelling.

Other situations in my exhibitions ticked both considerations.

One of the iconic objects in *De Cupisnique*, and probably the oldest one, was a Cupisnique-style bottle. It is unique in its type, in the form of a man engaged in acts of contortionism, with his face and body bearing tattoos of stylised human faces. The object is displayed by itself, in an island case, as an extraordinary masterpiece, worthy of admiration for its aesthetic quality. However, the label tells the story of how the object arrived in the hands of its original collector, from a dealer who said it came from a recent illegal “discovery”, and the scientific recovery of the tomb carried out by the state agency just after the object was looted. So even though we can admire the Contortionist for its unquestionable uniqueness and beauty, the visitor now knows when it was made, where it was found and probably also why it was made in the first place.

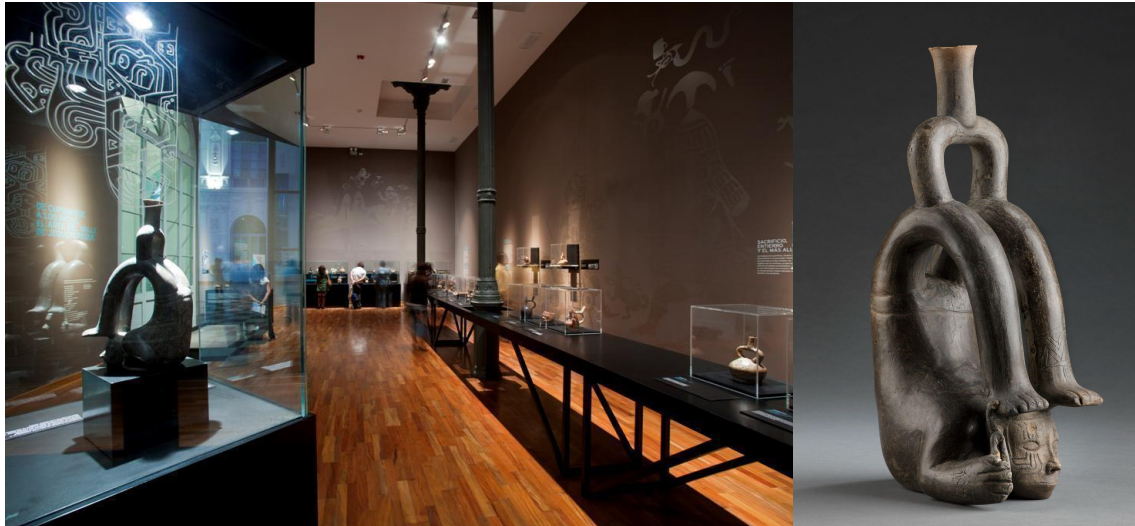


Fig. 17. Contortionist bottle in the *De Cupisnique a los incas* exhibition. MALI, 2010.

Another example helps further illustrate the innovation of archaeological display and pedagogical engagement in my work. We visualised the *Castillo de Huarmey* exhibition as a preliminary interpretation of a recently discovered burial belonging to the Wari elite (AD 600-900). The potential of having the intact context saved from looting was crucial. The discovery also became a platform for discussing broader topics crucial today in Peruvian archaeology. Apart from displaying the funerary assemblage, the show brought objects from other collections, providing them with new names and labels. These included a group of textiles from the National Museum that researcher Heiko Prumers had excavated at Castillo de Huarmey in the 1980s;¹⁰⁵ a selection of textiles from the Amano collection, which its founder Yoshitaro Amano had recovered at the site during the 1970s; and finally a group of illustrations that Julio C. Tello had produced during one of his expeditions in 1919.¹⁰⁶ Before they became part of the exhibition, the textiles had only been studied as isolated objects for their stylistic and aesthetic qualities. In the context of the exhibition, however, we were able to imbue them with new meanings and associations; for example, their possible provenance and or the fact that they materialised the expansion of Wari, a highland culture, to the coast,

¹⁰⁵ Prumers, 2000.

¹⁰⁶ Yacovleff, 1930.

information that most Peruvians weren't aware of. This was also a way of revealing objects, which had been in storage for decades, to the public eye.

This section has attempted to illustrate, with a few specific examples, how the histories of collecting and the different approaches towards the public presentation of the material past drive my curatorial work in exhibitions, as well as in their accompanying catalogues. The chapters that introduce each volume detail some of these considerations (pp. 9-10 in this document).



Fig. 18. Textiles, photographs and early drawings from Castillo de Huarney displayed for the first time in an exhibition dedicated to the site. MALI, 2014.

V. Discussion and concluding remarks

The purpose of the foregoing study has been to detail and evaluate the collective contribution of six archaeological exhibitions and catalogue projects I led at MALI (2009-2020). I have highlighted where my practice has enabled new, significant and often necessary innovations in archaeological display in Peru. Through pioneering exhibitions and displays of world-class standard, new audiences in Peru, young and old, have had access to updated narratives about their past based on the most current investigations in archaeology, anthropology, and related fields. This has never been done systematically or on such a scale, or integrated scientific research and curatorial collaborations as part of a long-term initiative, in a country with very few resources for the dissemination of culture and where scientific advances in archaeology are rarely communicated in public forms of education. These practices spearheaded at MALI signal part of a new trend in Peruvian museology, a new starting point, and a framework for curatorial practices in the future.

Across this analysis, we have outlined the role of museums as the principal institution whereby audiences can engage with objects and stories from the past, in a non-formal learning experience. As individual projects and as a continuing programme, MALI's exhibitions and their edited volumes have been leaders in contributing to enhance this engagement in the Peruvian museum scene.

I have also reflected on the different views on how (and if) museums can display the past, and if so, whether they should be based purely on archaeological research, or on more accessible, and less academic approaches. Through the documentation of my exhibitions and publications, I have intended to propose a new way of sharing the past, one which moves away from radical arguments intending to criticise the educational role of the museum (Shanks and Tilley), but instead reinforcing these institutions as crucial spaces for these interactions.

My curatorial projects have proved that museums are spaces where education about the past can be achieved by working closely with academic scholarship and at the same time providing more dynamic and accessible displays that promote active learning, evoke curiosity

and stimulate awareness.¹⁰⁷ This opposes structured forms of education where information is transferred more rigidly and hierarchically from the teachers or scholars to the students/ audiences¹⁰⁸ based on often outdated written records. In my exhibitions and publications, we also innovated by sharing less mainstream exhibition narratives, by establishing new connections between objects and by enriching their biographies. These projects produced and shared new kinds of knowledge and were able to complement the topics addressed in the School's National Curriculum, which still is yet to be updated.

An important aspect in my work was the relevance of paying attention to the different meanings that objects acquire, from the moment they were produced, and throughout their social life before and after their arrival in the museum. Applying Gosden and Marshall's term, I have proved that "thinking biographically", helps transform the museum object, from a decontextualised museum specimen to an interactive and meaningful element, with enormous engaging potential. By saying this, I refer to its archaeological biography (use, function, context), but also to its life post-discovery.

These new meanings and connections, however, cannot be achieved without adding people to the equation. The links between objects and particular individuals, a topic that has been previously stressed,¹⁰⁹ acquired relevance for me, especially with the role played by archaeologists, collectors (in the journey prior to the object's arrival in the museum), and myself in my curatorial role as a meaning-giver.

I personally believe that objects do come with their own intrinsic meanings derived from their physical attributes, but the agency they are given can extend their potential to communicate.

What can we say from the object beyond its mere physical attributes? What are the stories that make this object alive and interact with a broader context? These narratives, where

¹⁰⁷ Johnson and Majewska, 2022; Delgado Ceron and Mz-Recaman, 1994: 149.

¹⁰⁸ Funari, 1994: 121.

¹⁰⁹ Gosden and Marshall, 1999: 172; Joy, 2009: 543.

particular individuals have played a significant role in the objects' different "reincarnations"¹¹⁰ are some of the interests that have guided my work.

For example, for our presentation of *De Cupisnique a los incas*, which sought to contextualise a new acquisition (a private collection) and expand knowledge of its previously underappreciated objects and cultures; in the process, the exhibition justified its relevance in relation to its new home, MALI. The collections amassed by Javier Prado (MALI's founding collector) and Oscar Rodriguez Razzetto, (the private collector to whom we acquired the collection), the result of their personal interests added to the realities of the antiquities market, were crucial in defining the narratives of the show, as they felt almost complementary. The existing gaps in MALI's pre-Columbian collection seem to be perfectly filled with the new acquisition. Similarly, having the Temple Radicatti collection of khipu as a long-term loan and the basis for the *Khipus* exhibition meant having a new group of objects that came to be museum imbued with meanings and connections that had been initially proposed by their original collector. Comparably, new attributes and meanings were assigned to the Early Nasca Funerary mantle (Fig. 16) in the *Nasca* exhibition when framed in the broader history of Peruvian archaeology, where individuals like Julio C. Tello played a key role.

But, in the same way as we can draw important data from the people in relation to the objects, other works argue that objects accumulate information in such a way that we also can learn about certain people's lives through studying the objects.¹¹¹ This approach reflects on methodologies that were not necessarily addressed in my projects, centred on the person, rather than on the object, a potential topic worth exploring for the future.

These considerations on the biography of objects are, of course, framed in a curatorial (therefore subjective) process, where there are many different paths that can be followed. As Kopytoff points, the cultural reactions to object biographies can vary as they are subject to different aesthetic, historical, and political judgements.¹¹² This can be applied to the

¹¹⁰ From Joy, *ibid.*

¹¹¹ Gosden and Marshall (1999: 174) cites Hoskins work on Sumba, Eastern Indonesia (1998).

¹¹² Kopytoff, 1986: 67.

collection amassed by Javier Prado (Section 4.1), who acquired them for having a personal value, which could be guided by either aesthetic or scientific reasons, selected from what was available in the antiquities market at the time. It is also the case of the curatorial processes where most topics were the result of my own choices and judgements. In my role as leading curator, I was given autonomy to propose these themes, which were drawn from discussions with external reputed scholars.

This brings us to an underlying current in the curatorial process, which is the value given to a singular object versus a generic group of things, and how meanings can be shifted by these values. When Kopytoff reflects on the singularisation of objects, they are “precluded from being commodified”, standing out from the rest in another category, often more valuable.¹¹³ This discrimination has been present in different stages in the lives of the objects I have worked with. At one point in time, they were singularised by the societies that produced them. *Castillo de Huarmey*, for example, was an exhibition focused on a ‘new’ collection of objects, one largely retrieved and reconstructed intact from the field with contextual information: we dealt with a group of objects found in a tomb. During the Wari period, they were selected from a larger group as they must have held a special value for the women who were buried in the chamber, which they were to take with them to the afterlife. In a later stage, objects were again distinguished from the whole discovery to be part of the exhibition and illustrated in the publication. At this stage, they were highlighted taking into consideration aspects such as their state of conservation, aesthetic values or relevance for the exhibition’s narrative.

On reflection, my exhibitions, at many levels, have been about selecting and managing the social lives of objects. By taking them out from the museum’s storage or asking them as loans from other institutions, they were placed in a higher hierarchy than others. Some objects also stood out within the context of the exhibitions and publications. As indicated earlier, the Contortionist in *De Cupisnique*, was assigned as the show’s star object due to the reasons outlined in section 4.2. But it was also the case of a group of objects that we haven’t been able to discuss here in detail but were devoted special places in my projects. These included, for example, a Chimu model (*Modelando el mundo*, 145-162), an alabaster cup (*Castillo de*

¹¹³ Ibid.: 73.

Huarmey, 130-133), a Moche feline cape (*Moche y sus vecinos*, 168-171), a Nasca Ceremonial Drum (*Nasca*, 240-241) and the Mangas Khipu-board (*Khipus*, 172-175).

We have seen that meanings attributed to the objects in my exhibitions were influenced by their biographies, so instead of presenting them as rigid elements, they become active beings, even though they are not physically modified.¹¹⁴ This takes us to a second point, which concerns the labelling and nomenclature of objects. Whenever possible, in my exhibitions I attempted to move away from classical forms of naming objects, by including new layers of information brought mostly from the research on the objects' biographies and providing data on provenance and context. In this sense, I could not agree more in the benefits that the biographical approach has on how objects are read and perceived in exhibitions. Again, the *Contortionist* provides a good example whereby we enriched the object's label and caption by bringing new updated data on its discovery and provenance. In *Modelando el Mundo*, we did this by bringing together nomenclature from different disciplines —archaeology, art history and architecture— to the labelling and interpretation. This was particularly successful in the studies of particular objects included in the exhibition's catalogue (see, for example, texts by Protzen and Dam).

Other reflections that emerge from this study were addressed in Section 1.3, where I illustrated recent initiatives in relation to the curation of Andean Archaeology. I am aware that despite their innovative nature, my curatorial projects might be seen as more traditional than other museum projects being shown worldwide, as they did not prioritise other forms of curation, such as working with source communities and incorporating indigenous voices, a critical topic in current museological conversations. Today, it would seem impossible to plan an exhibition without taking into account the voices of those who in theory “represent” the objects that are exhibited. In the case studies presented here, there were important factors that explain why this could not be achieved.

Firstly, as discussed, the complexity of integrating voices in a context where indigenous communities do not necessarily claim being direct descendants of pre-Columbian cultures, should be treated with the utmost seriousness and sensitivity. Additionally, in my projects

¹¹⁴ Gosden and Marshall, *ibid*: 170.

priorities were given to share and provide access to an updated story of the past before embarking on other more inclusive forms of curation. Moreover, these innovations did not have a space in my projects since the museological approach of my projects were mostly collection-based, and finally because of the limited resources (human and financial) that didn't allow the development of projects with living communities.

The question on how we should raise indigenous voices within the narratives of the pre-Columbian past has become one of the main challenges and opportunities I envision for my future work.

* * *

Although we do not have quantitative data to measure project outcomes, some indicators attest to their impact. MALI's archaeological exhibitions were the most visited in the museum's history. (Table 1, Appendix B).¹¹⁵ Additionally, *Castillo de Huarmey*, *Nasca* and *Khipus* were awarded the *Premio Luces* award in the category of best exhibition of the year.¹¹⁶ Additionally, the edited volume *Modelando el mundo* was selected as a finalist in the category "publications" of the VIII Iberoamerican Architecture Biennale in Spain, 2012.¹¹⁷ The exhibitions have also been crucial in establishing the international recognition of MALI as one of the most important museums in Peru and the region. Two of them travelled to important museum venues in North America and Europe. This was exceptional for a self-funded institution with limited fixed resources.

The MALI projects were, however, not free of challenges (detailed in Table 2, Appendix B). These lay mainly with the limited financial resources, which demanded time-consuming fundraising tasks that were not always successful. Moreover, the limited resources and lack of professionalised staff resulted in the inability to perform evaluations to better understand museum audiences and their needs. Audience research in museums is critical to improving

¹¹⁵ For example, the Nasca exhibition received 84,000 visitors in its four months of duration, a considerable number for Peruvian standards.

¹¹⁶ Sponsored by the Peruvian newspaper, *El Comercio*, the *Premios Luces* are awarded to individuals and audiovisual productions that stand out in the field of art, culture and entertainment.

¹¹⁷ For additional information, see: <https://peru.com/estilo-de-vida/cultura/libro-peruano-modelando-mundo-queda-finalista-viii-bienal-iberoamericana-arquitectura-y-urbanismo-2012-noticia-66915/>.

the visitor's experience, primarily where these cultural institutions compete with other leisure experiences in today's global world.¹¹⁸

Thirteen years after my first MALI show, the archaeological exhibition scene in Peru continues to develop, but remains uncertain. For several years, there were high expectations for the recently founded and somewhat controversial Museo Nacional de Arqueología (MUNA). However, located on the outskirts of Lima, the new 60,000 square meter building does not receive regular visitors, because it does not have a systematic exhibition programme or display for its permanent holdings.¹¹⁹

Besides the museums mentioned in Section 2.2.2 and other small-scale initiatives in regional museums, MALI remains the foremost institution dedicated to exhibiting the cultures of ancient Peru. It continues promoting research projects and collaborations to develop its programme of temporary exhibitions. The museum is currently looking into implementing audience evaluation strategies, to improve the exhibition's experience. But such evaluations will require additional staff training and data processing resources.

After detailing the contributions of this study, the following concluding points emerge from my analysis:

- For over a decade, MALI's pre-Columbian exhibitions and their accompanying publications filled critical gaps in the Peruvian museum scene, bringing new and significantly updated narratives about ancient Peru to general audiences. These projects acquired particular relevance in a country rich with many pre-Columbian traditions that spanned millennia but with few resources to disseminate this legacy.
- The way the history of ancient Peru has been taught in schools is still very much centred on traditional forms of learning focused primarily on the most known cultures, such as Moche or Inca, or in a history constructed on classical chronologies. Therefore, what this critical analysis has emphasised are new kinds of knowledge that complement formal learning and add new or enhanced meanings to these ancient traditions.

¹¹⁸ Kelly, 2004.

¹¹⁹ Poppe, 2023.

- My exhibitions satisfied an appetite for archaeological exhibitions in Peru. Located in downtown Lima, MALI needs to cater to a wide range of visitors in terms of age, economic situation, education and place of origin, hence the experience needed to suit a wide range of audiences. The exhibitions also contributed to bringing regional archaeologies to the capital city, which has a positive effect in disseminating new research across the country.
- The historical and social context of Peruvian museums and how Andean material culture has been studied and approached have significantly affected the ways of displaying the topics addressed in the MALI exhibitions. Including these underlying aspects in the exhibitions' narrative and exposing them to the public can enrich the museum experience.
- The six exhibition catalogues¹²⁰ are major milestones in Andean Archaeology. The essays and studies of objects comprised in them, guided the exhibition narratives, and my exhibitions made those texts accessible to many audiences. My own contributions had the pivotal role of introducing the projects and inserting current topics of Peru's past into wider museological discussions. They are valuable documents of the exhibitions, as physical literature when more places are increasingly turning to PDFs, but they are also innovative models of visual design.
- The way we achieved these projects helps to rethink what is possible in the context of archaeological displays in Peru. The methodology, from the conception and the fundraising tasks to the development and delivery of both the exhibitions and publications, improved continuously from project to project by overcoming the various challenges we encountered (Table 2, Appendix B). I envision these experiences as an ongoing learning process that builds the framework for future curatorial projects.

Ultimately, the present analysis has explored the nature, relevance and impact of six curatorial projects since 2009. They are part of new forms in which Peruvians can relate to their past, which is more informative, engaging and updated. I achieved this through collaborations developed with researchers and institutions over a decade. These projects have

¹²⁰ From a series comprising eight volumes edited to date.

also been enriched by paying attention to the journey that objects throughout their lives; these result in different narratives, connections and nomenclatures. Finally, I hope they can serve as a framework for future curatorial practices, whereby we will see more initiatives focused on bringing the beautiful stories of ancient Peru to museum audiences, while also raising the standards of how we share these stories with the public.

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