

# DANCING WITH LIFE

MEXICAN MASKS



TRAVELING EXHIBITION SERVICE



INTERNATIONAL  
ARTS AND ARTISTS

# DANCING WITH LIFE

## MEXICAN MASKS

*“The devil masks before did not have animals on their faces. He was totally what the person was, the devil. Now they have been modifying and transforming. There are other communities that use masks for shepherds that we call hermits [holy men]... That is why they say that the pastorela or what the masks are has been changing and transcending, and the masks take on a different appearance. This hermit I gave to my son. My father made this one for me, and I made this one for my oldest son and this one for my youngest son. That is why the masks and traditions have been changing and this has been going from generation to generation. I am the second generation of mask makers and my children would be the third generation.”*

Felipe de Jesús Horta Tera, Tócuaro mask maker

**A**cross Mexico, mask making is a vibrant and playful artform with community roots in the celebration of religious holidays. Worn by dancers in rollicking performances known as danzas, masks depict devils and holy men, celebrities from media and politics, and—in a satirical vein—other known individuals who personify sinners and false idols.

*Dancing with Life: Mexican Masks* invites audiences to explore the rich festival culture of Mexico through historic and contemporary masks from the collection of the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture. Curated by

Dr. Pavel Shlossberg (Gonzaga University), the exhibition focuses on the Michoacán region of Mexico and features fifty historic and contemporary masks and five complete sets of stunning danza regalia.

From elaborately painted, fearsome diablos to the gentle faces of kindly elders, the masks in *Dancing with Life* celebrate the artistry and creativity of the mask makers and their communities, enlivened by the sights and sounds of the festivals themselves. Through humor and subversion, mask makers have always responded to the social and political circumstances of everyday life. The exhibition’s

This Page: Unidentified artist, *Pascola*, c. 1970s. Pascola Dance, Sonora. Wood, paint, animal hair, 14 x 4 ¼ x 4 in. Collection of the MAC/MONAC transfer, 1992, D. Harner. Image courtesy of the collection of the MAC. Photographed by Dean Davis Photography, 2021.

Cover: Juan José Horta (b. 1972), *Owl with Serpents*, 2021, Decorative Mask, Tócuaro, Erongarícuaro, Michoacán. Wood, paint, 14" x 10" x 8 ½". Image courtesy of the collection of the MAC. Photographed by Dean Davis Photography, 2021.



Unidentified artist, *Caiman*, c. 1970s. Caiman dance, Guerrero. Wood, paint, 45 ½ x 10 ½ x 9 ½ in. Collection of the MAC/MONAC transfer, 1992, R. Graff. Image courtesy of the collection of the MAC. Photographed by Dean Davis Photography, 2021.

survey of the continuum of mask making showcases this constantly evolving practice as invariably modern. Rather than situating festival culture and masks as a dying art in the face of encroaching modernity, *Dancing with Life* illustrates that changing forms and materials have always been a part of the danzas. The exhibition centers the work of the mask makers and dancers themselves through written and recorded interviews, including bilingual Spanish and English texts. This approach invites visitors to appreciate danzas as expressions of contemporary living culture, in which symbols and scripts from pop culture and religious narratives coalesce into explorations of spiritual matters, political issues, and community life.

### About the Exhibit

*Dancing with Life* is divided into five sections:

- *Winter Danzas in Michoacán, Mexico* introduces visitors to the tradition of winter festivals throughout Michoacán
- *Mask Making/Mask Artists* showcases the work of the mask makers and explains the role of mask making in the local economy and community
- *Fiesta Context* explores the religious and social contexts of the winter festivals

- *A Variety of Community Dramas* further examines how each community has developed its own unique blend of festival elements and symbolism
- *Not Disappearing/Contemporary Art and Culture* considers how festivals in Michoacán have always been a contemporary art, changing over time with the people who celebrate them

*Dancing with Life* was developed in association with Gonzaga University. Funding for the exhibition and catalogue were provided by Cheney and Mary Cowles, the Carl M. Hansen Foundation, and Cheryl Westerman.

*Dancing with Life* is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue featuring essays by Dr. Shlossberg, Dr. Luis Urrieta, Jr., Dr. Mintzi Auanda Martínez-Rivera, and Dr. Gabriela Spears-Rico. The catalogue also includes bilingual interviews with twelve of the artists featured in the exhibition.

*"I started working when I got married. I was taught here by my mother-in-law, who is no longer here. Well, and it's been around twenty years since I learned to make masks.... Her name was Rosalía Hermenegild, and she was the one who taught me how to make masks.... Here, almost a majority of the women work [with clay], yes. The men, they don't do much of this work, but they do work on other things. But here, it's the women who do most of the work on that."*

Mía Carmen Campos Jironimo, Santa Fe de La Laguna mask maker



Unidentified artist, *Moor*, c. 1970s. Dance of the Moors & Christians, Puebla, Mexico. Wood, paint, 9 x 7 ½ x 10 ½ in. Collection of the MAC/MONAC transfer, 1992, D. Allegretti Image courtesy of the collection of the MAC. Photographed by Dean Davis Photography, 2021.



Fidel Pascual Salvador (b. 1966), *Devil*, c. 2016. Dance of the Viejitos y Changos, Pichátaro, Tingambato, Michoacán. Wood, paint, 8 x 12 ½ x 6 ½ in. Collection of the MACImage courtesy of the collection of the MAC. Photographed by Dean Davis Photography, 2021.



This page: Felipe de Jesús Horta Tera (b. 1961), *Devil*, 2021. Pastorela, Tócuaro, Erongarícuaro, Michoacán. Wood, paint, horn, 20 x 20 x 12 in. Collection of the MAC. Image courtesy of the collection of the MAC. Photographed by Dean Davis Photography, 2021.

Opposite page: Felipe de Jesús Horta Tera (b. 1961), *Devil*, 2021. Pastorela, Tócuaro, Erongarícuaro, Michoacán. Wood, paint, 13 x 19 x 9 in. Collection of the MAC. Pictured with coordinating regalia. Image courtesy of the collection of the MAC. Photographed by Dean Davis Photography, 2021.



Mía Carmen Campos Jironimo (b. 1965), *Elder*, 2021. Dance of the Huacaleros, Santa Fe de la Laguna, Quiroga, Michoacán. Ceramic, glaze, 7 x 6 ½ x 4 ½ in. Collection of the MAC. Image courtesy of the collection of the MAC. Photographed by Dean Davis Photography, 2021.



Unidentified artist, *Negrito*, c. 1920s. Dance of the Negritos, Michoacán. Wood, paint, 8 ¼ x 6 ¾ x 4 ¼ in. Collection of the MAC/MONAC transfer, 1992, F. Viren. Image courtesy of the collection of the MAC. Photographed by Dean Davis Photography, 2021.



This page: Eleuterio Cristostomo Carreón (b. 1938), *Elder/Mama Coco*, 2021. Dance of the Viejitos, Quinceo, Paracho, Michoacán. Wood, paint, 10 x 8 x 5 in. Collection of the MAC. Image courtesy of the collection of the MAC. Photographed by Dean Davis Photography, 2021.

Opposite page: Unidentified artist, *Tiger/Jaguar*, 1970s, Tigrada dance, Chilapa, Guerrero, Wood, paint, metal, and glass, 15" x 13" x 8 1/2", Image courtesy of the collection of Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture (MAC)/Museum of Native American Cultures (MONAC) transfer, 1992, D. Allegretti. Photographed by Dean Davis Photography, 2021.



### About the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture

Founded in 1916, the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture is the largest cultural organization in the Inland Northwest, serving more than 100,000 visitors a year. It is one of Washington State's five Smithsonian affiliates and is accredited by the Alliance of American Museums. The museum resides in the historic Browne's Addition neighborhood of Spokane, Washington.

Commonly referred to as the "MAC," the museum preserves and cultivates the heritage of the Inland Northwest people through collections, exhibitions, and programs that bring their stories to life. Its collection of Plateau American Indian art and artifacts is the largest in the world; more than one million objects are maintained and preserved at the MAC, including fine art, artifacts, documents, photographs, and material culture from the Americas, Europe, and Asia.

### Curator Bio: About Dr. Pavel Shlossberg:

Dr. Pavel Shlossberg grew up in Queens, New York City, and in New Jersey. He received his PhD in communications from Columbia University. Currently, Pavel is the associate dean in the School of Leadership Studies at Gonzaga University. As a young scholar, Pavel had the privilege to live with and learn from mask artists in Tocuaro, Michoacán, Mexico. His continuing collaboration with artists in Michoacán has shaped his work critiquing academic and museum approaches to framing and representing Mexican Indigenous masking practices in Mexico and internationally.

## EXHIBITION SPECIFICATIONS

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#### Number of works:

Approximately 55 objects

#### Organized by:

International Arts & Artists,  
Washington, DC

#### Curator and Lender:

Dr. Pavel Shlossberg and the  
Northwest Museum of Arts and  
Culture

#### Requirements:

Moderate security

#### Participation fee:

Please inquire

#### Shipping:

Arrangements will be made  
with International Arts & Artists;  
exhibitors pay outgoing  
shipping costs within the  
contiguous US.

#### Booking Period:

12 weeks

#### Tour:

Fall 2025 – Fall 2029

#### Size:

2500 – 3500 square ft.

#### Contact:

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