

## MATERIALS

- boxes (assorted small) or cardstock
- Pre-cut patterns (optional, pattern available on page 4)
- decorative and colored paper, magazines or printed pictures
- scissors
- pencils
- glue sticks
- sequins
- plastic gems (optional)

## RESOURCES

- Museum of International Folk Art, Online Collections.  
<http://collection.internationalfolkart.org/search/retablo>
- Smithsonian Folklife Festival - Ayacucho Crafts.  
<https://festival.si.edu/2015/peru/crafts/ayacucho-crafts/smithsonian>

## VOCABULARY (definitions on page 5)

- **Festival**
- **Portable altars**
- **Pachamama**
- **Pasta**
- **Retablo**
- **Conquistador**
- **Taller**
- **Indigenista**

## NATIONAL VISUAL ARTS STANDARDS

- **Creating:** Conceiving and developing new artistic ideas and work.
- **Presenting:** Interpreting and sharing artistic work.
- **Responding:** Understanding and evaluating how the arts convey meaning.
- **Connecting:** Relating artistic ideas and work with personal meaning and external context.



Claudio Jiménez & Vicente Antacusi Flores, *Box with Scene*, Lima, Peru, 2007. Gift of Connie Thrasher Jaquith, MOIFA. Photograph by Blair Clark.

# Folk Art of the Andes

## Peruvian Retablos

### INTRODUCTION

The Andes is the great mountain range of South America that extends along the western coast of the continent. It is separated into three natural regions, with the north running through Venezuela and Colombia and the south through parts of Argentina and Chile. The central area, encompassed by Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia, was the most important for the development of prehispanic cultures.

### OBJECTIVES

1. To understand the way that Peruvian retablos are used in devotional practices or as illustrations of everyday life (historical and cultural understanding).
2. To describe and discuss the process of making a retablo, including the use of symbols and imagery, their meaning and the materials that are used (perceiving, analyzing and responding).
3. To explore 2 and/or 3 dimensional design elements shapes and forms, decorative motifs, materials and symbols when making their own retablo (creating and performing).

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In the early nineteenth century, colonial citizens in different parts of the Andes began to organize an independence movement to free themselves of the Spanish Crown. This led to a series of battles where the Spanish military opposed troops consisting of colonists and Indians. By 1829, the liberators had succeeded and several autonomous republics were founded. Within this post-Independence environment, folk art began to flourish. Mestizo and indigenous artists were freer to create useful and beautiful things for their own benefit and for trade to a broader market.



### Questions for Discussion:

- How would you describe the environment in which you live?
- Is it a mountainous region?
- What types of vegetation thrive in your area?
- What is the history of the peoples?
- Were there indigenous people who lived where you do?
- What happened when people from Europe came?

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# Peruvian Retablos

## MOTIVATION

- Peruvian retablos are portable boxes that are decorated to represent scenes from everyday life or devotional figures, like saints. Mixed media elements are used to create scenery and decoration, like paint, stones, feathers, fabric and leather. Figures are sculpted out of pasta, a combination of dried potato, calcium and liquid.
- Have your students look at portable altars and scenes from Peru or images of them. Tell your students that they can make their own retablo that is a scene from everyday life, for example, a room at home, their street or school, another neighborhood scene or vista. They can choose to represent a memorable event such as a birthday or another celebration.
- Students can also create a retablo that depicts a devotional image, someone who is important to them, a hero or heroine, important family or community figure or a religious image. Have the students share some of their ideas in a group discussion. Explain that you will be working with small boxes and/or folded papers and that they will be decorating their retablos with decorated papers, images, drawings and their imaginations.

## PROCEDURE

1. Have the students select either a box or a piece of stiff paper to use to create their retablo. (Some students may choose to use both, if they can.) Show the students how to either draw a retablo form on the paper, or use a pattern to trace, then cut out and fold the paper.
2. Students can then select decorated and colored paper and pictures to use.
3. The papers are cut out and glued into place with glue sticks. Encourage the students to consider and possibly decorate all of the sides of their retablo.
4. Students should make sure that their retablos can stand up in the manner which they want; then they can set them aside to dry.



## EVALUATION

- Students can write labels for their retablos. Encourage them to write a detailed description, perhaps even a story about it. Create a display of each student's retablo along with its label.

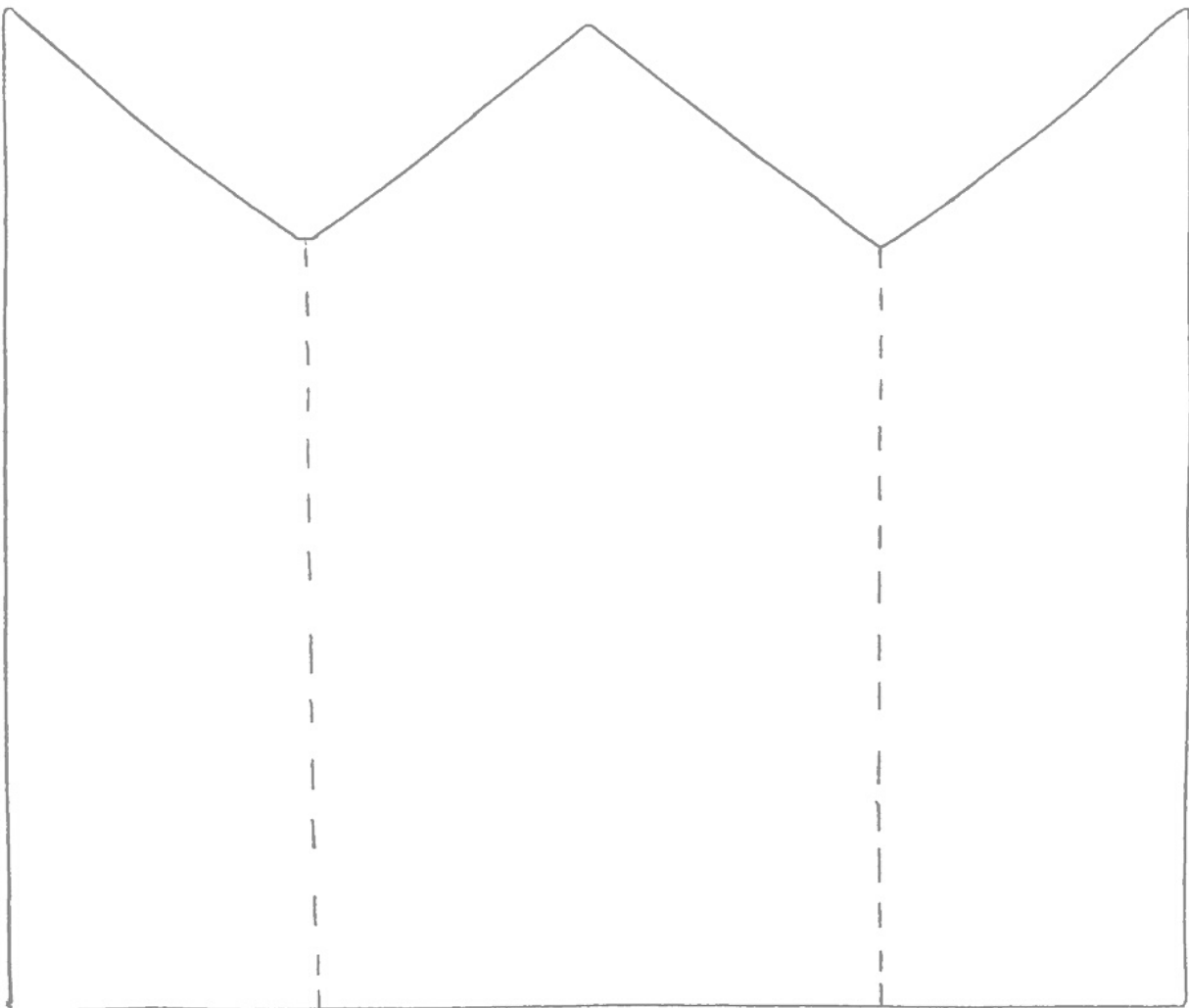
## CONNECTIONS & EXTENSIONS

- Select a theme for a group retablo and get a larger box with flaps to use for the retablo doors. Have the students collect as well as draw images related to the overall theme. The students can adhere the images to the box and then create small figures out of clay to populate the retablo. The entire group can create a label – each student can articulate the elements that they worked on.

## VOCABULARY

1. **Festival** - a time for merrymaking especially with a program of cultural events.
2. **Pachamama** - Andean goddess of the Earth.
3. **Pasta** - a malleable paste made from dried potato, calcium and liquids, used to create sculptures.
4. **Retablo** - a series of paintings or carvings representing a story or an event, in Peru it can be used to describe portable boxes with miniature genre scenes or portable shrines.
5. **Taller** - a workshop or artist's studio.
6. **Conquistador** - a leader in the Spanish conquest of America in the 15th & 16th centuries.
7. **Portable altars** - an European practice of using small, box like altars to carry sacred images.
8. **Indigenista** - a movement that embraced indigenous, or the original peoples and their culture.

### Retablo pattern



# Peruvian Retablos



Portable Altar with San Antonio and San Juan Bautista. Potosí, Bolivia, ca. 1940. Private Collection. Photograph by Blair Clark.

## Portable Altars

The European practice of using small, box like altars to carry sacred images was introduced into the Andes by Spanish priests and European colonists in the sixteenth century. Catholic missionaries utilized the small shrines to facilitate religious teaching in the Indian villages. By the eighteenth century, Andean devotion to Catholic images had increased and *portable altars* were used to keep Christian figures in homes as well as to carry them to local churches to receive blessings from the priests. By the nineteenth century the indigenous people were freer to use the traveling shrines for their own types of religious practices. Figures of saints were worshiped both for protection of the family and for their powerful assistance with the health and reproduction of animals and crops. In many areas of the highlands the Andean people carried the portable shrines into the countryside as part of pilgrimage rituals and to use in the Fiesta de Herranza, a *festival* for counting and marking animals owned by the family. These traditions continued into the twentieth century and in some areas are still carried on today.

**Questions for Discussion:** Have you seen or used portable altars? If so, when and where? Have you ever been to a religious festival that is held outside? What was it for and what was it like?

# Peruvian Retablos



Marino Palomino, *Box with Scenes*. Huancavelica, Peru, ca. 1985. Gift of Lloyd E. Cotsen, MOIFA. Photograph by Blair Clark.

## Portable Boxes with Scenes

In the 1940s a group of intellectuals in Lima began the *indigenista* movement that embraced indigenous people and their way of life. They made a trip to Ayacucho to learn more about the culture of that region and met with various artists to see what they were making. One prominent artist, Joaquín López Antay, had been producing portable altars and other religious items since learning the craft from his parents in the late nineteenth century. He told the group of intellectuals about the decline in these art forms due to a breakdown of the established distribution system to the rural clientele. One of the women on the trip suggested they try marketing the portable boxes to collectors in Lima and broaden the subject matter inside them to depict festivals and other activities from the Ayacucho region. This initiated a new form of folk art that is still going on today. The figures inside the boxes are sculpted with traditional *pasta*, made from dried potato and liquid.

**Questions for Discussion:** What kinds of things do you see every day? What are your favorite holidays or festivals? How would you show those scenes if you could put them into a box?

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## TEACHER GUIDES

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## WEBSITES

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"Collections: Museum of International Folk Art." <http://collection.internationalfolkart.org/search/retablo>

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## FILM

*Ausangate*, by Andrea Heckman & Tad Fettig, color, 61 minutes, 2006. Documentary Educational Resources.